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SCIENCE FICTION IN REVIEW

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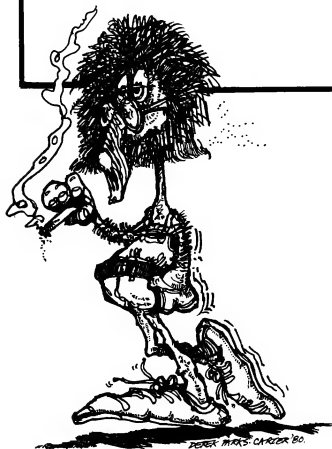
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THE ALIENATED CRITIC doug fratz

editorial



THRUST RECEIVES 1979 HUGO AWARD NOMINATION

It was to my great surprise and pleasure last month that I received notification from Noreason II that finally, after all the years of sweat and tears, Thrust—Science Fiction in Review has been nominated for a Hugo Award as the best fanzine of 1979. I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to all of you who voted for Thrust. I have no real hopes of winning at the Worldcon this September (especially with Science Fiction Review and Locus still in the fanzine category) but the nomination is more than enough to please me.

I was surprised to see that Fantasy Newsletter did not make the nominating ballot as one of the top five fanzines, especially since the newsletter walked

away with two Balrog fantasy awards. Apparently, there is becoming a definite chasm between fantasy and science fiction fans, quickly leading towards the creation of two separate fandoms—fantasy fandom now even has its own worldcon. SF fandom has always had its sub-fandoms—Lovecraft fandom, Tolkien fandom, etc. But not since the splitting off of comics fandom from sf fandom in the early 1960's has there been a new fandom created the way I see fantasy fandom being created. (Unless you count gaming fandom...)

THE ISSUE AT HAND...

This issue, I've been presented with a new problem. I've been keeping my editorial standards extremely high over the years, a practice which has worked quite well in keeping the amount of material scheduled for each issue at a reasonable level. But this issue, although Thrust is on firm financial ground, I found that the suddenly immense need for editorial expansion had totally outstripped the magazine's fiscally based capacity for physical enlargement. (Have I been in Washington, D.C. too long?) In other words, I received too much good material—almost twice as much as I could print, actually. This issue, I added four pages, but that's as far as I could go. I know I'm going to get a lot of gripes because I had to cut the letters column to three pages...

I'm very happy this issue to announce the addition of George Alec Effinger to Thrust's long list of regular columnists. Also of particular note is Gardner Dozois' excellent, all-inclusive review of the sf field in 1969. Hopefully, this can become a yearly feature—Gardner Dozois is certainly one of the field's most knowledgeable spokesmen.

COMING NEXT ISSUE:

An interview with Joan D. Vinge by Robert Frazier; John Shirley's last Paranoid Critical Statement (at least temporarily); Dave Bischoff describing the wonders of the British TV show, Doctor Who; Jessica Amanda Salmonson on the distinction between sf fan and professional; Mark J. McGarry on the difference between writing and becoming a writer; Darrell Schweitzer looks at hard science theology; and much more.

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SF RETROSPECTIVE: 1979



Mike Remondy

Gardner Dozois

The Big SF Boom of the late seventies did not bust and collapse in 1979 — not quite. For the first time, though, there were definite signs that the end of the boom may be at hand, and if the wave of success that has been building for the past four years did not quite shatter and fall in 1979, the guess of most observers is that it has at least crested. The question now seems to be not "can the boom keep on booming?" — that seems fairly well settled: it can not, at least at anything like its former headlong pace — but "can SF as a genre hold on to some of its new prosperity and popularity, hold on to at least some of the new high

ground it gained during the boom?" If it can not, we may soon be in for the collapse and disastrous retrenchment long predicted by some critics, and the next few years may be bleak ones for SF.

So far, here at the beginning of the eighties, the outlook is not sanguine.

According to Locus, passing on the results of a sales survey by the Association of American Publishers, sales of mass market paperbacks declined 10 to 15 percent for the period January to May 1979 as compared to sales a year ago, the first downturn in paperback sales since World War II: January through May hardcover

sales are also off 15 percent from a year ago. This is an industry-wide phenomenon, of course, affecting all of the American publishing world, and stemming from causes such as inflation, recession, and the skyrocketing cover-prices of both hardcover and softcover books (caused in turn by the skyrocketing costs of paper, labor, and so forth) — nevertheless, SF seemed particularly hard-hit, perhaps because it has been over-extending itself in the past few years (glutted markets mean falling sales), or perhaps because, as a coherent and cohesive genre, the effects were more easily recognizable.

The slowdown in sales that put a damper on British SF last year hit the American SF scene with a vengeance this year: All SF magazines, with the exception of Omni, were down somewhat in sales in 1979. Ace, Dell, Berkley/Putnam, Harper & Row, and several other publishing houses made cutbacks in their SF lines this year, some of the cutbacks severe. All over the SF world, money is tight, editors are less willing to back up their editors, books that are considered to be less than "surefire" commercially have been postponed, shelved, or dropped outright, and rumors persist that at least two major paperback SF lines are in danger of being dropped entirely by their publishers. Risk-taking is way down in the short-story markets, and dozens of writers have had stories rejected for being "too far out," "too risky," "too literary," "not enough like Star Wars," and so forth. Corporate publishing, with its emphasis on bulk sales and uniformity, is strengthening its hold on the genre. And as sales become riskier, advances go down: Robert Silverberg's novel Ridd Valtine's Castle, which sold to hardcover at the height of the boom for a reputed \$127,500, sold to paperback this year for "only" a reputed \$75,000 — still a big advance, certainly, but not a patch on the half a million dollar paperback sale observers were predicting for the book last year.

And yet, in spite of all these evil portents, I am not yet willing to scatter ashes over my head and conclude that All Is Lost. Here at the beginning of the eighties, a touch of historical perspective is also needed. SF has survived through periods of collapse and disastrous retrenchment before, and can — and will — survive through such a period again if worse comes to worse. But I don't think the worst will happen; I don't think things will get that bad, that fast, and I have (what seems to me to be) sound historical reasons for a constrained and cautious optimism about SF's future.

One: it has been pointed out, I think with a good deal of justification that every boom-and-bust cycle has left the habitual SF-reading audience larger than it was before the boom began. SF is, at the moment, an enormous genre — more SF was published in 1979 than ever before, more than 100 books a month, according to Locus, with more than half of these books new titles (a record that is likely to stand for some time). Even if cuts a good deal more substantial than any so far announced are made, the "retrenched" genre will probably still be larger than the genre as a whole was prior to the start of the late seventies boom. Things may get a lot tougher and tighter, a great deal of the present fat may eventually be trimmed away, but even so, I seriously doubt that SF will ever go back to pre-1974 levels of readership or advances or sales.

Two: there are counter-entropic trends visible. The enormous success of Omni. Dave Hartwell's renovation of Pocket Books, and the fine new hardcover line he's putting together for Simon and Schuster.

The success, to date, of the hardcover line from St. Martin's Press. The slow but steady improvement in the Doubleday SF line under Pat LoBrutto. The commercial stability of the Del Rey SF line. The new SF line being started at Playboy Press, and the assignment of Page Cuddy as Avon's new editor. The fact that, in spite of cutbacks, Dell, Ace, Berkley/Putnam, and Harper & Row have continued to keep strong SF lines alive. The fact that "quality" publishers like Knopf are dabbling in SF, with, so far, a measure of success. And the fact that, in spite of the SF books that don't sell, many SF books do sell very well indeed, both in hardcover and paperback — and some sell phenomenally well.

Three. there are more good writers, of many diverse types, producing now than at any time during the history of the genre, including the so-called "Golden Age" of the forties. "Golden Age" (and earlier) writers like Asimov, Heinlein, Sturgeon, Leibner, Simak and Williamson are still writing, as are poster Big Names like Anderson, Knight, Pohl, Budrys, Dickson, Harrison, Herbert, Clement, Clarke, Vance, Aldiss, Ellison, Shekley, Dick and Silverberg. The "new writers" of the sixties — Delany, Zelazny, Niven, Moorcock, Wilhelm, Lafferty, Russ, Spinrad, Bova, Le Guin, Disch, Roberts, Tiptree, Wolfe — became the Big Names of the seventies, and are still creating as vigorously as ever. And those writers who were "new" and unknown at the beginning of the seventies have established a reputation base, are now beginning to produce work a quantum jump better than any they've produced before, and are well on their way to becoming the Big Names of the eighties: Michael Bishop, Joe Maldean, Gregory Benford, John Varley, Jack Dann, Howard Waldrop, George R.R. Martin, Phyllis Eisenstein, Ian Watson, Christopher Priest, Vonda N. McIntyre, Edward Bryant, Lisa Tuttle, George Alec Effinger, Elizabeth A. Lynn, Marta Randall, Charles L. Grant, Joan D. Vinge, Pamela Sargent, Robert Thurston, and easily a half-dozen others. Surely some of this amazing spectrum of writers will survive any possible period of "retrenchment."

Four: and possibly the most important reason of all : good new writers continue to come into the field in a steady stream, and as long as there are good new writers coming along, there is hope for the future of SF. Recent years have seen promising debuts by James P. Girard, John Crowley, Hilbert Schenck, Dean Ing, Greg Bear, Michael Shea, Jane Yolen, Tony Sarowitz, Paul David Novitski, Mildred Downey Broxon, Carter Scholz, Charles Sheffield, Connie Willis, Bruce Sterling, Jake Saunders, Donald Kingsbury, Cynthia Felice, David Drake, A. A. Attanasio, Lee Kilgoun, Alan Ryan, Sontag Shachtikhin, Bob Leman, James Patrick Kelly, John Kessel, Juleen Brantingham, and a dozen others. A bit farther down the road are writers like Michael Swanwick, Eileen Gunn, Leigh Kennedy and Beverly Evans who are just making their first few sales at the beginning of the eighties (with Swanwick in particular already starting to acquire a reputation among insiders): behind them is yet another rank of hopefuls. Many of the above writers will falter and fall by the wayside, some will turn out to be minor writers or occasional writers (not necessarily the same thing), but some of them will be among the Big Names of the nineties.

My own Fearless Forecast, then, for the state of SF in the eighties is that we can expect tough times, belt-tightening, and a general loss of creative energy in the early eighties (as was also true in the early seventies), but that if we can somehow hang on to artistic diversity in the face of the homogenizing pressures of corporate publishing (if SF is not mashed down into as rigidly-standardized a mold as, say, gothics or regency romances), and if commercially "marginal" but

To be printed as the introduction to Best Science Fiction Stories of the Year, Ninth Annual Collection, due from Dutton this fall.

artistically-vital story markets like The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction survive, then we can expect to see a return of energy and prosperity in the mid-to-late eighties.

Only time will tell if I'm right — or dramatically wrong.

Again this year most of the action was in the magazine field, in spite of sagging mid-summer sales, and most of 1979's good short fiction appeared in one magazine or another.

Although conservative critics continued to predict Omni's imminent demise throughout much of 1979, that magazine not only survived but prospered. With a circulation of roughly 800,000 newsstand sales per issue, plus a subscription list of 100,000, and with major advertisers like General Motors locked into long-term contracts, Omni's survival for at least the next few years seems assured. Meanwhile, it is the most widely-distributed of any SF magazine (carried by most newsstands, drugstores, supermarkets, etc.), people can be seen reading it in laundromats and on buses and subways and commuter trains, and many observers have recognized it as one of the major publishing success stories of the past ten years. Somewhat more surprisingly, Omni has proved to be as artistic as well as a commercial success; after a moderately slow start last year, Omni published more first-rate short SF in 1979 than any other magazine, with the perennial exception of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Excellent work by George R.R. Martin, Suzy McKee Charnas, Dean Ing, Gregory Benford and Gene Wolfe appeared in Omni this year, along with good stuff by Juleen Brantingham, Jack C. Haldeman II, Joe Haldeman, Alfred Bester, Ben Bova, Rick Gauger, Spider Robinson, Robert Halisty and Roger Zelazny.

Toward the end of the year, former Fiction Editor Ben Bova moved up to replace Frank Kendig as Omni's Executive Editor, assuming responsibility for the total editorial content of the magazine. Bova was in turn replaced as Omni Fiction Editor by SF writer Robert Shekley. Certainly much of the dramatic improvement in the overall quality of Omni's fiction this year can be attributed to Bova's work as Fiction Editor, and it will be interesting to see what sort of affect the appointment of Shekley will have — Bova and Shekley are very different as writers, and I would surmise that their literary tastes differ widely as well. Shekley for instance, is usually thought of as a writer with an anti-technology slant, but if he therefore bars "hard" SF from Omni, stuff like the Benford and Ing stories, he might well be making a serious mistake. As yet, of course, no one knows what changes Shekley actually will make, or in what direction those changes will point. Whatever does happen, it is to be hoped that the quality of the fiction in Omni will remain up to this year's high standard.

Over at Analog, new editor Stanley Schmidt is also competing against Ben Bova's track record (Bova was editor of Analog for seven years before moving to Omni late in 1978), and so far has not quite measured up to it. Under Schmidt's first full year as editor, Analog's cover art has improved dramatically, but the overall quality of the fiction has gone down. Many of Analog's most popular series of recent years — particularly Spider Robinson's "Callahan's Bar" stories and Sam Nicholson's "Captain Schuster" stories — seem to have followed Bova to Omni, and Omni also published many individual stories this year by people like Joe Haldeman, George R.R. Martin, Orson Scott Card, Dean Ing, Gregory Benford and Spider Robinson that almost certainly would have appeared in Analog instead if they'd been written a couple of years ago. Many of the above writers were developed by Bova during his long tenure as Analog editor, and their de facto desertion to Omni has drained a lot of the life from Analog — and so far Schmidt has not

succeeded in developing new writers exciting enough to adequately replace them. Good stories by Edward Bryant, Gregory Benford, Robert Thurston, Donald Kingsbury, Michael McCollum, and a few others did appear in Analog during 1979, but on the whole their short fiction this year was gray, dull, and overly-familiar, a fact that is perhaps partially accountable for the continued slow dwindling of Analog's circulation (below the 100,000 copy-per-issue mark now, according to Locus). In fairness to Schmidt, it should be said that even Bova and John W. Campbell himself were unable to immediately impress their editorial personalities upon the magazine — it took both of them a couple of years to really hit the top of their editorial stride, and such may well be the case with Schmidt. Certainly it is too early to count Schmidt out; if he is willing to take a few more risks, widen his scope, and accept stories that lean away from the overly-familiar "Analog formula" (as Bova did in his time by pushing stories like Haldeman's "Hero" and Pohl's "The Gold at the Starbow's End" in front of an initially-hostile readership), then he may be able to reverse what now looks like a gradual downward trend.

Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine also had a somewhat dull year fictionally, and also suffered a slight overall loss in circulation. Again, at least part of the blame may perhaps be placed on a formula that may be becoming overly-familiar — there was a uniformity of style, subject matter, and treatment to many of the stories IASFM published this year, something that was noticed and commented upon by several other critics; there also is a slight but distinct "juvenile" feeling to much of IASFM's fiction, as if the magazine is being surreptitiously aimed at an audience of teenagers. Also, although it is an admirable thing to encourage new writers, IASFM may be relying too heavily on them — material by new writers has sometimes frequently had two or three different stories in the same issue under various pseudonyms. Whatever the cause, IASFM remains a remarkably uneven magazine; it probably publishes a higher percentage of good solid second-string material than any other magazine in the field, but rarely publishes anything of really first-rank quality. Good stories by Isaac Asimov, Randall Garrett (Garrett's "Lord Darcy" series also seems to have deserted Analog, appearing now in IASFM), Nancy Kress, Tony Sarowitz, Paul Novitski, Bill Earls, John M. Ford, Tanith Lee, Gene Wolfe, Milton Rothman and others appeared in IASFM during 1979, but the only really first-rate material to appear there this year was the de facto serialization of Frederik Pohl's novel The Cool War, broken up into several novellas that ran throughout the year.

Asimov's SF Adventure Magazine, IASFM's new companion magazine, suffers from most of the same faults as IASFM, but in exaggerated form — ASFA seems to be selling poorly, and was reported to be in financial trouble by the end of the year. After a poor start in 1978, ASFA picked up slightly with this year's Summer issue — which contained good stories by Samuel R. Delany and Roger Zelazny — only to drop sharply in quality again with the next issue. No other issues have yet appeared. The official word is that ASFA is "on hold," awaiting more detailed sales returns, but most genre insiders are betting that ASFA is dead.

Galileo gave up its status as a subscription — only magazine this year, and became widely-available on newsstands for the first time, distributed by Dell. Galileo's publishers were initially optimistic about the changeover — announcing that they expected "to reach a circulation of more or less 100,000" — but by the end of the year rumors were flying that the Galileo management was disappointed by the newsstand sales (averaging only 20 to 30 percent of distributed

copies, according to Locus, out of an 150,000 copy-per-issue press run), and by the beginning of 1980 they had announced tentative plans to drop newstand distribution and return to a subscription-only policy. Fictionally, Galileo pulled off a real coup this year with the serialization of Larry Niven's long-awaited novel Ringworld Engineers, and with the upcoming serialization of Joe Haldeman's new novel Worlds, but its fiction at the shorter lengths could still use a good deal of improvement — although some excellent work by Connie Willis did appear here this year, along with good work by M. Lucie Chin, Cynthia Felice, and John Kessel.

At year's end it was also announced that Galileo is purchasing the faltering Galaxy magazine — which publishes a few issues of negligible quality at odd times throughout the year — and turning it into a companion magazine for Galileo. Galaxy will be published bi-monthly, alternating with Galileo. Galaxy's new editor (the third in two years) will be Galileo's present Review Editor, Floyd Kesske.

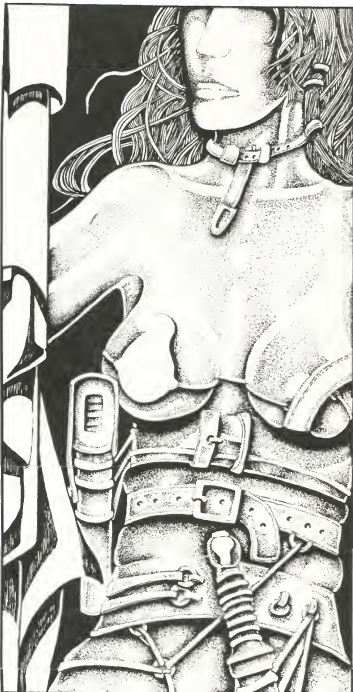
Once again in 1979, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction was the most consistently excellent of all the SF magazines. Despite the higher sales and circulations of other magazines, F&SF is — and has been, for years — the genre's most important magazine, unrivaled in its artistic leadership, with only Omni coming even anywhere close to it this year in quality and consistency. Excellent fiction by Jack Dann, James P. Girard, Vonda N. McIntyre, Hilbert Schenck, Michael Shea, Christopher Priest, Gary Jennings, Phyllis Eisenstein, Marta Randall, Bob Leman, Barry N. Malzberg, Bill Pronzini, Andrew Weiner, Jane Yolen, Lee Killough, John Morressey, James Patrick Kelly, John Kessel, Joanna Russ and a host of others appeared in F&SF in 1979. In spite of its many excellences, F&SF's circulation remains dangerously low, and I urge everyone reading these words who cares about the future of SF to subscribe to it; it is difficult to find on most newstands anyway, and to miss it is to miss the cream of the crop of magazine SF. (F&SF's subscription address is: Mercury Press, Inc., PO Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753; \$15.00 for one year, 12 issues.) Certainly if you are going to subscribe to any SF magazine, F&SF should be the one — support of F&SF is the one place where the expenditure of a few dollars of your money could help to ensure the survival of quality SF through the turbulent times ahead.

Two non-newstand, subscription-only magazines deserve mention: Whispers, edited by Stuart David Schiff, and Shayol, edited by Patricia Cadigan and Arnold Fenner. Whispers features the work of supernatural-horror and sword-and-sorcery writers, and published an especially good novella by Fritz Leiber this year in Whispers 13-14. Shayol is one of the most handsomely-produced magazines in SF, featuring graphics, poetry, and SF and fantasy by a host of bright young talents. This year's Shayol 3 was particularly attractive, featuring fine fiction by Steve Utley, Howard Waldrop, Michael Bishop, Lisa Tuttle, C.J. Cherryh and the late Tom Reamy. (Whispers: Box 1492W, Azalea St., Browns Mills, N.J. 08015; \$7 for a 4-issue subscription.) (Shayol: Flight Unlimited, Inc., 1100 Countryline Road, Bldg. 8, #29, Kansas City, KS 66103; \$10 for a 4-issue subscription.)

Unearth, another subscription-only magazine, may have died this year; nobody seems to know for sure, but I haven't seen an issue in awhile, and mail sent to them is coming back as undeliverable.

The original anthology market was weak again this year. Of the former "Big Three" hardcover anthology series, now reduced to the "Big Two" by the demise of Damon Knight's Orbit series, the best in overall quality was Robert Silverberg's New

Dimension 9 (Harper & Row), which contained excellent material by Ursula K. Le Guin and Tony Sarowitz, and good work by Peter Alterman, Jeff Hecht, Timothy Robert Sullivan, and Felix C. Gotschalk. There was, however, a similarity of tone and mood to many of the stories in New Dimensions 2 that made the overall mood of the anthology too homogeneous — many of the stories here might have shown up to better effect if they had been set off against different types of material. Last year I reported that New Dimensions was tottering on the brink of oblivion; this year I'm delighted to be able to report that the series has, at the last moment, been given a new lease on life. Although Harper & Row has dropped the series (they will bring out one more



Mike Romanow

volumen already in preparation), it has been picked up and continued by Pocket Books, who will publish New Dimensions 11 as a paperback original in the summer of 1980. The paperback New Dimensions series will be co-edited by SF writer Marta Randall, starting with #11; Silverberg has announced his intention of slowly phasing out of control of the series over the span of the next few volumes, ultimately leaving Randall as sole editor. The other "Big Two" anthology, Terry Carr's Universe 2 (Doubleday), was somewhat bland this year — it did contain good stuff by Greg Bear, Paul David Novitski, and Gregory Benford, and an intriguing but flawed novelette by John Varley.

Of the newer anthology series, James Baen's Destinies (Ace) and Roy Torgeson's Chrysalis (Zebra) seem to have most firmly established themselves — four volumes of the Destinies series appeared this year, and three volumes of Chrysalis. Of the two series, Destinies is the more solid, featuring good work this year by Haldeman, Benford, Ing, David Drake, Larry Niven, and Charles Sheffield. My only real complaint is that the stories here are too homogeneous in subject and style, and some of them too heavily-handedly preachy in behalf of the Cause of Space Industrialization Conspiracy, a self-appointed organ of agitprop for high technology and space exploration". If Baen can open Destinies up to different kinds of material, and can get his writers to downplay the heavy polemics (agitprop, however well-intended, is the fatal enemy of art), then Destinies may well become a lasting and important anthology series.

Chrysalis, on the other hand, while it does not seem to be grinding any particular political ax, is also much more uneven in literary quality. Good material did appear in Chrysalis this year — by Michael Bishop, Karl Hansen, and Charles L. Grant in Chrysalis 3; by Robert Thurston and Alan Ryan in Chrysalis 4; and by Hilbert Schenck in Chrysalis 5 — but the bulk of each volume was taken up by bad or mediocre stories, some of which should not have seen professional print at all. Torgeson seems to be more open to experimentalism and diverse types of story material than Baen, a quality to be sincerely applauded in these days of minimum risk-taking, but he needs to sharpen up his editorial discretion and flail away a great deal of the chaff here if Chrysalis is ever to become a really important series. It might help to decrease the frequency of publication — the three Chrysalis volumes produced this year could — and probably should — have been boiled down into one fairly good anthology. It might also help to use fewer vignettes; there are very few decent vignettes written during any one year, and yet Chrysalis published dozens of them this year, most of them execrable. Torgeson also started a fantasy anthology series called Other Worlds (Zebra) this year, about which most of the same remarks could be made.

George R. R. Martin's New Voices 2 (Avon) featured first-rate work by Lisa Tuttle and Thomas F. Monteleone, and interesting though flawed material by Spider Robinson and Gary Snider. Charles L. Grant's Shadows 2 reinforced this series reputation as a showcase for sophisticated, well-written horror stories, featuring first-rate work by Elizabeth A. Lynn, Jack Dann, and Michael Bishop, and good stuff by Peter A. Paut and T.E.D. Klein.

No editions of the Andromeda, Stellar, or Analog Yearbook series appeared this year.

One-shot original anthologies were also scarce in 1979, unlike last year. The best one-shot anthology of the year was Charles L. Grant's Nightmares (Playboy Press), similar in tone and quality to Grant's Shadows series, and containing good original work by Beverly Evans, Steven Edward

McDonald, Chelsey Quinn Yarbro, Geo. W. Proctor and J.C. Green, as well as good reprint stuff by Jack Dann, Stephen King, Avram Davidson, and others. The stories in Lee Harding's The Rooms of Paradise (St. Martin's Press) are full of original and speculatively-exciting ideas, but are often poorly or indifferently executed, making for an interesting but uneven book; Michael Bishop, Ian Watson, and Gene Wolfe contribute the anthology's best stories, with Brian W. Aldiss, Cherry Wilder, Philippa C. Maddern and George Turner also doing good work. Also interesting were Amazons!, edited by Jessica Amanda Salmonson (DAW), and Thieves' World (Ace), edited by Robert Asprin.

Many good reprint anthologies appeared in 1979, marking the apparent resurgence of this market. Among the best were: Robert Silverberg's The Best of New Dimensions (Pocket Books), which belongs in every SF library, alongside 1976's The Best From Orbit; Terry Carr's The Year's Finest Fantasy Vol. 2 (Berkley); Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh's The 13 Crimes of Science Fiction (Doubleday); Barry N. Malzberg and Bill Pronzini's The Fifties (Baronet); Martin Harry Greenberg and Joseph Olander's Science Fiction of the 50s (Avon); Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg and Charles G. Waugh's The Science Fictional Solar System (Harper & Row); and Jerry Pournelle's The Endless Frontier (Ace).

None of 1979's novels thrust itself forth as obviously and unmistakably the year's best — as had Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness, Haldeman's The Forever War, or Pohl's Gateway in their respective years — but the year was nevertheless a good one, seeing a large crop of strong and speculatively-exciting novels published across a wide spectrum of style, subject-matter, and taste.

My own personal favorite was Len Deighton's SS-GB (Knopf/Del Rey), a dark horse candidate many will consider to be on the periphery of the field. My own opinion is that this brilliantly-executed book, an "alternate worlds" novel about the Nazi occupation of England, is as valid as SF as any book about spaceships and black-holes — and in the quality of its characterization and prose, and its grasp of historical milieu and complex political and psychological realities, it is head-and-shoulders (unfortunately) above the genre average. One SF writer, though, who loses nothing to Deighton in either psychological sophistication or technical expertise is Thomas M. Disch, who with the superbly-written On Wings of Song (St. Martin's Press) has produced a novel that may well cross genre boundaries to gain Disch the wider audience he deserves. Although parts of Disch's 334 and Camp Concentration were perhaps superior in some respects to Song, Song is a more even and sustained overall performance; there is hardly a false step in the book, and Disch's elegant prose, dark wit, and razor-edged irony have never worked to better effect. As effective in a totally different way is Arthur C. Clarke's The Fountains of Paradise (Harcourt Brace/Del Rey), one of Clarke's best novels, perhaps his most balanced and even-handed literary performance to date. Although not a stylist of Disch's sophistication, Clarke's prose is clear, flowing and precise, and occasionally poetic in a register that even Disch is deaf to — that poetry, the celebration of the transcendence of technological man, is what makes the book (as it makes all of Clarke's best work), along with the vast scope and awesome originality of the engineering project that is the book's ostensible subject, and the ring of authenticity he brings to its description. Although smaller than the backdrop they move against, Clarke's characters are adequately complex in their dry and

understated English way to balance the book and add the human interest large-scale technological SF novels often lack. My only real quibble with *Fountains* is that Clarke's civilized, war-free One World Utopia seems completely unreachable to me; I can't see how we could possibly get there from here, and Clarke, maintaining a discrete silence, makes no real attempt in the novel to show us how we supposedly did.

Another novel that operates on a vast technological scale, if somewhat less successfully, is John Varley's *Titan* (Putnam). *Titan* deals with a concept even larger and more mind-boggling than that of the Clarke novel, and the technological/physical stuff is worked out in ingenious and fascinating detail; but the book lacks the tension, unity and grace of *Fountains*, and ultimately gives the impression of having done less with its own material than it might have done. *Titan* has much to recommend it, but an episodic plot and an abrupt and unconvincing ending make *Titan* "merely" a good SF novel, instead of the great one it might have been. Yet another novel of grand scope that ultimately fails because of poor execution (and fails a great deal more completely than *Titan*) is George Zebrowski's *Macrolife* (Harper & Row): Zebrowski comes up with some intriguing conceptualization here, and the book's timescale is certainly vast enough to suit the most cosmic-minded of fans, but the book's characters also lecture at each other for page after unbroken page of stiff dialogue in true Gernsbacker fashion, and as a novel *Macrolife* is didactic, static sociologically naive, and dull. Old pro Frederik Pohl effortlessly steers his new novel *Jem* (St. Martin's Press) past many of the problems that threaten to founder *Titan* and *Macrolife*, and yet in spite of the suppleness and expertise Pohl brings to its execution, *Jem* ultimately feels to me like minor Pohl (which would, of course, be very good indeed for most other writers). Like Pohl's award-winning *Gateway*, the writing is excellent, and many of the incidental concepts marvelous; unlike *Gateway*, the underlying satiric structure is too obvious (the three political Blocs from Earth, each matched with/satirized by one of the three intelligent native races on the planet Jem), and the characterization lacks the deeply-felt empathy of *Gateway*, leaning away from human complexity toward caricature in its portrayal of unsympathetic characters. In structure, in its emphasis on satire, and even in its terminology ("the Greasies," "the Peeps"), *Jem* is more reminiscent of the *Galaxy*-era Pohl of the fifties, the Pohl of *The Space Merchants* and "The Midas Plague" than the Post-New Wave Pohl of *Gateway* and "The Merchants of Venus," and I can't help wondering if this book wasn't originally started in the fifties or early sixties and only finished or refurbished recently. Published originally as a series of stories over an eight-year span, Michael Bishop's *Catacomb Years* (Berkeley/Putnam), a "novel of stories" all sharing a common background in a domed Atlanta of the future, is also somewhat uneven: the Bishop of 1970's "If a Flower Can Eclipse" is just not as good a writer as the Bishop of 1977's "The Samurai and the Willows" of 1978's "Old Folks at Home." Overall, however, the book is excellent, certainly one of the year's best, and does make up into a valid, though necessarily episodic, novel — the writing and characterization range from good to superb, and the mosaic picture set forth of city life in the future is bizarre, fascinating, and almost Byzantinely complex. Michael Bishop's *Transfigurations* (Berkeley/Putnam), expanded from Bishop's famous story "Death and Designation Among the Asadi," is another major novel, excellent in its evocation of truly alien aliens and their strange and intricate interface with humanity. Also first-rate is Kate Wilhelm's *Juniper Time* (Harper & Row), an intense, psychologically-complex, and all too plausible picture of one woman's life in a brutal-

ized future of "diminished expectations"; only the slight murkiness of the ending keeps the book from being as strong as Wilhelm's award-winning novel *Where Late The Sweet Birds Sang*.

John Crowley's *Engine Summer* (Doubleday) is also a thoughtful and literate book, detailing the intricate lifeways of one of the stranger — and most interesting — Utopias of recent SF; Crowley's book will be too slowly-paced for some, but rewards close and careful reading. Samuel R. Delany's *Tales of Neverson* (Bantam) is being marketed as a sword-and-sorcery book, complete with a cover painting of a sword-wielding hero confronting a dragon, but the reader who picks up this intelligent and unusual fantasy in search of another Conan rehash will be disappointed and perhaps dismayed. Like Crowley, Delany is concerned primarily with the lifeways and social motivations of his characters (the description of palace politics and intrigues in the book's first section is particularly fine), with special emphasis on the ways that economics, linguistics, and sexual mores effects society. Throughout the novel, Delany plays with stock fantasy clichés in a way that will outrage many sword-and-sorcery fans — the muscular barbarian hero, for instance, turns out to be a bondage freak and homosexual pederast. Decadence is also the key word in Michael Moorcock's lush and sophisticated novel (*Gloriana*) (Avon), a beautifully crafted, slyly witty, and, yes, decadent book that is probably the best novel Moorcock has produced in a long and often uneven career. Stylish fantasy of another sort is provided in Elizabeth A. Lynn's *Watchtower* (Putnam). Last year I referred to Lynn as "promising first novelist" — with *Watchtower* she had fulfilled a good deal of that promise, producing a strong, lyrical and compassionate novel peopled with finely-drawn characters. Lynn's *The Dancers of Arun* (Berkeley/Putnam), a sequel to *Watchtower*, is also first-rate, although it lacks some of the powerful personality contrasts and conflicts that are at the heart of the other book. Richard Cowper's *The Road to Corlay* (Pocket Books) and Phyllis Eisenstein's *Shadow of Earth* (Dell) were among the other books this year that were reminiscent of fantasy in trappings and atmosphere while remaining valid SF — *The Road to Corlay* is an evocative "Post-Holocaust" novel reminiscent of Pangborn's *Davy*; *Shadow of Earth* is a gripping "Alternate Worlds" novel featuring an unusually strong and vividly-portrayed protagonist.

Stephen King is another writer who has been working with good effect at the shadowy borderland between SF and fantasy. Although he is best known as a writer of supernatural horror fiction, King has been drawing closer and closer to SF with each book, providing interesting hybrids of SF, fantasy, and horror fiction along the way. His closest approach to SF yet is to be found in his engrossing new novel *The Dead Zone* (Viking). Conceptually, *The Dead Zone* is old hat, concerning a man who gains clairvoyant powers, and the effect those powers have upon his life. In execution, however, *The Dead Zone* is terrific; King is a tremendous storyteller, a lively and effective prose stylist reminiscent of John D. MacDonald, and a writer able to create paper characters who live and breathe and bleed — all this makes *The Dead Zone* one of the best handlings of the ESP theme in many years, although there's not even a close approach to a new idea in the book. King's *The Stand* (Signet) — a very expensive book available now for the first time in a mass-market edition) also breathes new life into old, worn-out SF material, and succeeds in making an 816-page "Just-After-the-Holocaust" novel not only interesting but riveting, something I would have thought impossible this many years after *On the Beach*. Here there is a new idea, and a honey, as King audaciously blends the Post-Holocaust subgenre with a Tolkienesque fantasy of the ultimate confrontation between Good and Evil that takes place, appropriately enough, in modern-day Las Vegas. King maintains control of this immense



and multi-layered book almost all the way to the end (there is a feeling toward the end that he is just trying to get it all over with), and once for once The Stand is probably the best reading bargain of the year. Another master of science-fiction, this one a veteran who has been conjuring up marvels for thirty years or more, is Jack Vance, present this year with The Face (DAW), the long-awaited (for over ten years) fourth novel in Vance's "Demon Princes" series, started in 1965 with his famous novel The Star King. Vance fans will need to know no more than that -- for those not familiar with Vance, The Face, although not quite up to the level of The Star King, is a prime example of what Vance does best: fast-paced action and galactic intrigue set against a marvelously-evocative background of strange alien worlds and cultures, all laced with Vance's dour irony and deadpan wit.

Also worthwhile were Tim Powers's The Drawing of the Dark (Del Rey), George Alec Effinger's Heretics (Doubleday), Michael de Larrabetti's The Borribles (Ace), Michael Connor's I am Not the Other Houdini (Perennial Library), Roger Zelazny's Roadmarks (Del Rey), Octavia E. Butler's Kindred (Doubleday), Gregg Bear's Hegira (Dell), D.G. Compton's Windows (Berkley/Putnam), Pamela Sargent's The Sudden Star (Fawcett), Ben Bova's Kinsman (Dial Press), George Turner's Beloved Son (Pocket Books), Phyllis Eisenstein's Sorcerer's Son (Del Rey), Poul Anderson and Mildred Downey Broxon's The Demon of Scattery (Ace), Robert Anton Wilson's Schrodinger's Cat (Pocket Books), Dan Ing's Soft Target (Ace), Poul Anderson's The Merman's Children (Berkley/Putnam), Spider and Jeanne Robinson's Stardance (Dial Press/Dell), and a reprint of Algis Budrys's Some Will Not Die (Dell), a long-unavailable novel whose first section has interesting parallels with King's The Stand. SF readers may also be interested in Ursula K. Le Guin's Malafrena (Putnam), although it is neither SF nor fantasy, but rather a mainstream novel set in the imaginary Eastern European country that was the location of Le Guin's Orsinian Tales.

Worthwhile short story collections also appeared in large numbers in 1979, although there were not quite as many of them as last year.

Michael Bishop's Catacomb Years (Berkley/Putnam), if counted as a collection rather than as a "novel of stories," would probably be the year's best, containing as it does some of the most memorable SF stories to be published during the seventies. If Catacomb Years is discounted, then Vonda N. McIntyre's Firelood and Other Stories (Houghton Mifflin) is the best collection of the year, a strong and elegant collection of literate and thoughtful SF by one of the genre's best new writers. Also excellent is Christopher Priest's An Infinite Summer (Scribner's); Priest is one of the most prominent members, along with Ian Watson, of what I suppose must be called "The New British New Wave," for lack of a less clumsy term, and in An Infinite Summer he provides memorable examples of just how effective and feverdream vivid that type of writing can be. One of the best reading buys of the year is to be found in Damon Knight's Rule Golden and Other Stories (Avon), a collection of five superb novellas, among them the hard-to-find (and

magnificent) "The Earth Quarter"; highly recommended. Also highly recommended are The Best of Avram Davidson (Doubleday), and Stephen King's Night Shift (Avon) -- Davidson is the underappreciated master of sly, richly strange, and subtly hilarious SF and fantasy, and King's collection will send chills up the spine of the most jaded and hardened readers. Ian Watson's The Very Slow Time Machine is worthwhile but uneven: Watson is an idea man, and comes up here with some of the most outrageous and imaginative concepts of recent times, but his execution of those ideas is sometimes sloppy and indifferently good. Norman Spinrad is also an uneven writer, but The Star-Spangled Future is probably his best collection to date; there are a few mediocre stories here, but heavily on the plus side are "Lost Continents" and the classic "The Big Flash," among others. New writers Joan D. Vinge and Charles Sheffield occasionally show the unevenness of development, but make strong debuts in, respectively, Eyes of Amber (Signet) and Vectors (Ace); note particularly "Tin Soldiers," and "View From a Heights," the Hugo-winning title story in the Vinge collection, and "Fixed Price War" and "The Treasure of Oerlex" in the Sheffield.

The year's other good collections were: The Best of Hal Clement (Del Rey), The Best of James Blish (Del Rey), Randall Garrett's Murder and Magic (Ace), Philip Jose Farmer's Riverworld and Other Stories (Berkley), Theodore Sturgeon's The Stars are the Stryx (Dell), Cordwainer Smith's The Instrumentality of Mankind (Del Rey), Brian Aldiss's New Arrivals, Old Encounters (Harper & Row), and C.L. Moore's Judgement Night (Dell).

The best SF reference book of the year, and probably the best of the decade (rivaled only by last year's Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections), was The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (Doubleday), edited by Peter Nicholls. Unlike the other books of recent years that have claimed to be SF encyclopedias (for instance, Brian Ash's confusing and error-riddled Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction), Nicholls's huge volume is a true encyclopedia, alphabetized, cross-referenced, the individual entries concise and well-researched, as up to date and as error-free as it is possible for such a compendium to be. There is a slight inevitable bias here toward the British New Wave, but on the whole the book is admirably balanced in its consideration of difficult and often partisan issues. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction is an indispensable reference work and research tool for anyone interested in SF; if you have room for only one book about SF in your library, make this the one. Also monumental was Isaac Asimov's 732-page autobiography In Memory Yet Green (Doubleday). Actually, huge as it is, In Memory Yet Green is only half of Asimov's autobiography, covering his life up to 1954; the other half, In Joy Still Felt, is due out sometime in 1980. I have heard people complain that In Memory Yet Green is boring -- and in truth, Asimov himself readily admits that "nothing of any importance has ever happened to me," so that we have pages devoted to such things as Asimov taking a driving test or Asimov passing a gallstone. Such material seems unpromising, yet such is Asimov's skill as a non-fiction writer, and such the charm he manages to project even while dealing with everyday mundanity, that I found the book absorbing, with only a few dull spots in its whole vast length. Asimov fans will, of course, be interested; for others, the book is worthwhile -- if for nothing else -- for the detailed picture it paints of what it was like to be a struggling young would-be SF writer in the New York of the depression years, a milieu so different from the present that Asimov might just as well be writing about life on an alien planet. In ironic contrast to Asimov, Samuel R. Delany has led a life many would consider exotic and fascinating (member of a rock band, world-traveller, shrimp-boat fisherman, etc.),

and yet in Heavenly Breakfast (Bantam) he has produced a slender little volume of autobiography not a sixth of the size of In Memory Yet Green. In truth, though, Heavenly Breakfast is only a partial autobiography, dealing only with one memorable winter (the winter of 1967 — the "Winter of Love," as Delany puts it) Delany spent in a hippie commune in the East Village. If, indeed, it should be considered an autobiography at all: Delany calls it an "essay," and admits to changing the sequence of events to suit himself and either combining several persons to make a single character or "atomizing" single persons to make several. A fictionalized autobiography? A heavily-autobiographical novel? Whatever it is, this look into an alternate lifestyle is fascinating, as lean and electric as anything Delany has written in years; good enough, in fact, to whet my appetite for the full-length autobiography I hope Delany will turn his head to one day. Ursula K. LeGuin's collection of critical essays, The Language of the Night (Putnam), edited by Susan Wood, is a little too eclectic; although the major essays here are clear-headed, incisive, and wise, there is also too much minor material included (brief introductions to other people's books, award acceptance speeches, even a fanzine semi-interview), and the effect is inevitably one of padding — if LeGuin did not have enough serious critical material available to fill up a book, the editor might have been better advised to wait until she did. As it stands, this is a book that should be in libraries, and that will repay close attention by serious readers and scholars, but its indiscriminate inclusiveness somewhat diminishes its overall effect. No excuses can be made for A Reader's Guide to Science Fiction (Avon), edited by Baird Searles, Martin Last, Beth Meacham and Michael Franklin — it is simply a bad job, riddled with factual errors and omissions, confusingly organized, and disappointingly shallow in much of its historical/critical perspective; I had expected better of Searles. Starlog's Science Fiction Yearbook (Starlog Press), covers much the same ground as Searles's Reader's Guide, but a good deal more successfully. Edited by David Gerrold and compiled by David Truessdale, this is a worthwhile and fairly complete overview of the year in SF, particularly valuable for its coverage of the often-ignored SF magazine field. "Opinionated" is probably the word that most typifies Lester del Rey's The World of Science Fiction (Del Rey); Lester has never hesitated to tell anyone his position on anything, and he sets his opinions on SF out here in unequivocal form. Whether you agree with those opinions or not will probably determine your opinion of the book — as I disagree with many of those opinions, particularly those concerning the significance of the last fifteen or so years in SF, I can't really recommend it; it is, however, full of interesting historic detail of the early days of the genre.

None of this year's SF movies managed to generate the excitement of 1977's Star Wars, although several of them were large box-office successes, and a couple of them were even worth watching. The year's best SF movie was Alien, which succeeds in spite of several flaws, including numerous scientific errors and a plot riddled with logical inconsistencies. Alien rises above these drawbacks by some extremely good production values (uniquely, more in the areas of set design and dressing than in the "space hardware" special effects that have become a stock cliché of recent SF movies), and by the simple fact that it is scary — a suspenseful and riveting two hours, Alien is in fact one of the scariest movies ever made, thank in part to intelligent direction, and in large part to H.R. Giger's obscene and surrealistic "monster" (the alien of the title), certainly the most effective movie menace ever put on the screen. Giger



is also responsible for the eerie interior of the alien spaceship, enormously more persuasive in its sense of utter strangeness than the alien artifacts in most SF movies, which usually rely on dry-ice smoke and colored filters to evoke "alienness." The cast turns in a number of good performances, outstanding among which is that of Sigourney Weaver as the only one aboard with sufficient guts and brains to take on the mauling alien — if for nothing else, Alien would be worthwhile as the first SF/horror movie where the heroine doesn't scream and faint when confronted with the monster. Another offbeat SF movie was Time and Again, in which H.G. Wells matches wits with Jack the Ripper in modern San Francisco. The movie's writers have no real understanding of the intricate mechanics of time paradox, and again the plot is marred by logical inconsistencies, but as a film Time and Again is witty and fast-paced and the performances are good, particularly that of Malcolm McDowell as the befuddled and idealistic H.G. Wells. The long-awaited Star Trek: The Motion Picture, perhaps the year's most relentlessly-hyped SF movie, struck me as adequate, although again scientific boners and lapses in plot logic abounded. When you consider, though, that \$40 million was spent on making Star Trek: The Motion Picture, more than the entire budget of all the television Star Trek episodes combined, you begin to wonder if "adequate" is really good enough — certainly the movie is no better than some of the individual television episodes, and, with its draggily-slow pace, worse than many. The much-touted special effects ranged from good (the cosmic cloud) to amazingly poor (the obviously painted-on backdrop of San Francisco, with most of the bustling spacecraft crowd in the foreground also painted on) — \$40 million, my, my, my. Mediocre as Star Trek was, Disney Studio's The Black Hole made it look like a masterpiece. Grindingly, unrelentingly bad, The Black Hole is one of the most dumbly-plotted, ineptly-acted, and scientifically illiterate movies I've ever seen. It is also terminally cute, with the seemingly-mandatory "cute robots" so sickeningly cute that they make Star Wars's R2D2 look plain and bluff by comparison; you could also see the wries that enabled them to "fly" in at least two scenes. A bad job all around.

Maybe next year's The Empire Strikes Back (Star Wars II) will be better. (Maybe).

The 37th World Science Fiction Convention, SeaCon, was held in Brighton, England over the Labor Day Week-end, and drew an attendance of 3,200 people. The 1978 Hugo Awards, presented at SeaCon, were: Best Novel — Dreamsnake, by Vonda N. McIntyre; Best Novella — "The Persistence of Vision," by John Varley; Best Novelette — "Hunter's Moon," by Poul Anderson; Best Short Story — "Cassandra," by C.J. Cherryh; Best Editor — Ben Bova; Best Professional Artist — Vincent Di Fate; Best Dramatic Presentation — Superman;

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Perhaps the most beloved science fiction illustrator in the field today, Frank Kelly Freas has captured the admiration and affection of the myriad readers and fans who have lauded and praised his work for the last quarter century. Indeed, Freas has been dubbed the "Dean of Science Fiction Artists," a lifetime title bestowed by the Eastern Science Fiction Association. Moreover, he is the proud recipient of ten Hugo awards from the World Science Fiction Society, the highest professional tribute that can be paid to a science fiction artist.

THRUST: In your book, Frank Kelly Freas: The Art of Science Fiction, you indicate that despite the fact that science fiction is coming more and more into vogue, the quality of science fiction art is becoming more and more banal. What did you mean by that statement?

FREAS: Briefly stated, the basic problem with science fiction art, as it stands now, is not the science fiction artist, but the science fiction buyer. Everyone has been adversely affected by the Star Wars phenomenon. Publishers don't realize that what sold Star Wars was a very entertaining story. It was a

INTERVIEW: Kelly FREAS

by Dr. Jeffrey Elliot

light-weight tale, having no deep significance. However, the story was a hell of a lot of fun! Most people think that what sold Star Wars was the special effects. They were great, certainly, but they were great because they were an integral part of the story. Unfortunately, many publishers have misinterpreted the success of Star Wars and attempted to capitalize on it by displaying Star Wars-type artwork on all their publications. This really amounts to nothing more than trying to sell the public what NASA has been trying to give them free, and quite unsuccessfully, for the last ten years. NASA can't even give away the nuts-and-bolts pictures. Most real science fiction enthusiasts would like to see something besides "hardware." However, the banality goes a bit further. It's compounded by the refusal of publishers to accept science fiction for what it is—namely, a literature of imagination and wonder. We should be looking for new ways of seeing things, not harking back to what was successful in 1933. This is an argument I've had with many people in the field, some of whom I've worked with for years and years. They think that the best way to sell a book is to put a Frank R. Paul cover on it, which did great back in 1933, but which is blowing on the same old horn. We should be doing something that's more in tune with 1979, 1983, 2000, instead of going back in time. Unfortunately, many artists cave in to the pressure of publishers, and revert to this old style of art. When the good things get through, it's usually in spite of the powers-that-be.

THRUST: What explains the lack of imagination on the part of publishers, many of whom might stand to benefit by embracing a new approach to science fiction art that is more contemporary?

FREAS: If I could answer that question, I would probably be a millionaire now. The same thing that keeps the publishers from doing it, I suppose, is the same thing that kept Paramount from doing a Star Trek movie all this time. They just couldn't get it into their damn heads that there was a market for this sort of thing. And when they saw how well Star Wars did, then, all of a sudden, after dragging their feet for years, they got off the pot and started to do something. Of course, many of them don't realize that the cream has already been skimmed. They're not going to make as much money as Star Wars did, regardless of what they do. However, they could have been making money all along, instead of waiting for the success of a film like Star Wars.

THRUST: Have publisher attitudes changed toward science fiction as a result of the success of films like Star Wars and Close Encounters? Do they view the genre differently now?

FREAS: To some extent, yes. From the standpoint of the business-types who run the organizations, they see this as a good bandwagon to get on. As a result, science fiction, regardless of its form, is given more respect. How long this will last, though, is anybody's guess. But aside from that, the change hasn't been that great. There's a reason for it, I think. Over the last fifteen years, and increasingly so in recent years, most of these organizations have been run by a "Harvard Business School Mentality." These people think that you can package creativity the same way you package hamburger or frozen pizza. And that's exactly what they're trying to do. From the business man's point of view, it's absolutely insane to waste time on science fiction titles. They just don't pay the same way that Harlequin romances do. In effect, the success of Star Wars and Close Encounters has been to convince these people that, yes, there is a market out there to be tapped, it they

can simply find a way to do it. But they're never going to get rich by publishing science fiction. At the moment, I think they're pushing it to the point where it will crest in another year or two, and then fade out again. However, I don't think it will ever get as bad as it was ten years or so ago.

THRUST: Has your own approach to science fiction art changed as a result of this new receptivity of Star Wars-like illustration?

FREAS: I think I could say, honestly, no. Basically, I enjoyed these two films, particularly Star Wars. I thought that Close Encounters was rather pretentious nonsense, myself. But, still, there were some very beautiful moments in the film. The real effect of these movies on my work has been to drive me more and more away from the nuts-and-bolts stuff, the hard-core science fiction approach, and back to what you might call the more "romantic" style of science fiction art. I've always felt, anyway, that science fiction was basically a romantic literature, and should take a romantic approach in terms of its treatment of art. For me, though, it's a little difficult to say that anything in the external world has a blank canvas, my mind is just as blank as the damn canvas. Each job is a whole new problem and I'm always looking for a new way of saying the same thing that has already been said 150 times before. Several years ago, as a result of this problem, I simply quit and went off to Mexico, figuring that I would take a year's sabbatical and recharge my batteries. I ended up staying there for three-and-one-half years. The problem I experienced at the time was basically a form of future shock. It was a direct result of the way in which I work. Essentially, I build up a whole world view based on the story I'm working on at the moment. And while I'm working on this thing, I'm living in that world. Then when I'm done, I have to knock the whole thing down and build a new one for the next story. This approach tends to insulate me from life to a great extent. As a consequence, one of the things I've found absolutely essential is to take on other forms of work, and relate myself directly to the real world, otherwise I would find myself floating out in space with no anchor whatever.

THRUST: Do you derive equal satisfaction from doing advertising art, for instance, as opposed to science fiction?

FREAS: No, not at all. The only reason I've stayed in the science fiction field all these years, particularly since I could make far more money in almost any other area, is the question of freedom, which equates with satisfaction. I have much more freedom in the science fiction field than anywhere else, especially now. As you know, I'm producing my own line of books—The Starblaze Series—which is a series of quality paperbacks, approximately 5" x 8", ranging from 75,000 to 100,000 words. It's a showcase edition. The line offers newer writers an especially valuable display for their work, enhancing its saleability to other publishers, whether for hard cover or mass market. These books are done with fine paper and binding; large, clean type. They feature a full color cover illustration and four to six interior black and white illustrations. These books are primarily intended as a collector's edition, and are sold both by mail and through bookstores. I'm doing more work for less money on Starblaze than I've ever done in my life, but that's because I basically have a free hand in developing the project. I'm responsible to no one but myself, which means that I'm willing to work twice as hard on every picture.

THRUST: What kinds of conditions do you insist on when

you accept an assignment?

THREAS: I don't usually insist on anything, except, perhaps, when somebody starts to stomp on my toes. It's at that point that I start to scream. Essentially, I ask to see the manuscript first. I don't like to work from a précis or a paragraph. I want to read the entire story. Second, I want to know what the pay is, and whether it's normal and reasonable. Usually, I sell only first reproduction rights; that means that the original and any future reproduction rights revert back to me. Aside from that, the only thing I'm really concerned about is how much time I have to work on the job. I'm very reluctant nowadays to work under pressure. I had enough years of being called at four o'clock in the afternoon and asked to deliver a cover at nine o'clock the next morning. I don't do that anymore. I don't have to. If they want a rush job, they can get someone else. There's lots of people doing that kind of work. They don't need me.

THURST: How do you decide which projects to accept? Given the large number of offers you receive, you must turn down some projects for one reason or another. What factors determine your decision?

FREAS: Well, sometimes I turn down a project for philosophical reasons. There was a period, for example, when I was convinced that it wasn't a good idea to expose young children to monster stories. I was asked by a publisher, who shall go nameless, to do a series on monsters, which I refused to do on moral grounds. I wouldn't have allowed my children to read that sort of thing, so I didn't feel I should expose other people's children to it. So, if I disagree with the philosophy of a story, I won't illustrate it, or if it's going to be done in a manner that I consider to be ugly, then I'll turn it down. I resent the popularization of the "cult of the ugly." There's enough ugliness in the world without me adding to it.

THURST: Do most publishers view science fiction art as appendage to a book or as an integral component of it?

FREAS: Ha! That will be the day. The publishers will only come around to considering science fiction art a valid thing in itself when some science fiction originals, and they will have to be commercial originals, sell in the galleries for \$60,000 to \$75,000 a crack. Then the publishers might take it seriously. But by that time, I suspect, they'll probably say, "This is too rich for our blood. Let's get something else for the covers." As you suggest, science fiction art is viewed mostly as an appendage. The whole view of science fiction art among the publishers is quite different from the view held by the readers. It may be changing a bit, but I think it will probably take a year or so to prove out. The new thrust, I believe, is the result of two things: first, a generation that has, from birth, been exposed to television and, second, a generation which is, in a majority of cases, functionally illiterate, who have been raised, by and large, on comic books. Now, comics people are much more visually oriented, and much more visually sophisticated, than the ordinary reader. And this is opening up a whole new market, which some publishers have sought to exploit. A good example is Larry Niven's new book, *The Magic Goes Away*, which is aimed primarily at the comic book market. Essentially, it's a glorified comic book. Now, to the average reader, this is an excess of illustration. To a real reader, the illustrations get in the way of the story. But to the young reader, who has been weaned on comic books, this isn't an excess of pictures; it's an unusual amount of words. I suppose we'll see a lot more of these kinds of books in the future. In fact, it may well be the salvation of science fiction art as a viable profession, because the only people who can

produce the volume of work necessary to do this sort of thing are going to be those trained as comic book illustrators; people who can think in terms of continuity, who can produce in volume, and who can turn out work fast. I'm not one of them. I work slowly and meticulously, and I think in exactly the opposite direction. I take 100,000 words and try to boil them down to one painting, whereas what's needed is the ability to take 40,000 words and get 100 illustrations out of them. However, I think this is going to be the coming thing in the future, primarily because these comics readers are science fictionally oriented.

THURST: Are you more pleased today with the physical treatment of your work in books and magazines—that is, the quality of artistic reproduction?

FREAS: No, not at all. The quality of reproduction, given the advanced technology we have at our disposal, is not much better than it was twenty-five years ago. Although we can do things today that wouldn't have been tried years ago, the mass of work that's done isn't especially good. For example, cover reproduction, by and large is worse now than it was in 1950.

THURST: How do you feel when you see a piece of your work shoddily reproduced, especially one in which you've invested a considerable amount of time and effort?

FREAS: I usually experience a surge of nausea. Occasionally, though, I'm pleasantly surprised, as I was with a recent issue of *Algoi*, which featured one of my pictures on the cover. My basic attitude is, though, "Okay, you bought the picture, now it's your problem." However, the general level of reproduction is so poor that I went into the business of producing my own art prints, simply so the viewer could see how the pictures were intended to look. I could get the prints, that I sell, for less than one-half of what I pay, but I wouldn't get the quality of reproduction that is possible. I insist upon absolutely the best quality color process work that can be obtained in the country. You can see, for example, in my newest line, the Starblaze prints, that the fidelity to the originals is absolutely incredible. It's impossible to get it perfectly, though. The only way to do that is to go into seventeen or eighteen colors. You can't do it with a four-color process. In some of my prints, I've gone as high as seven colors, but that was, for instance, where there's a red so red that three additional shades of red have to be printed in order to bring it out fully. However, that's a very special case. Ordinarily, my basic approach to painting is to use the Rockwell palette, which is designed for adequate reproduction by four-color printing. I've seen a number of incredible botches. I've had some reds come out as a sort of rusty brown, and so on.

THURST: Do you still get upset when you see your work produced at less than its best, or have you become so accustomed to shoddy reproduction that you've lost all real interest?

FREAS: Let's go at it from a slightly different angle. Alex Ross, for example, once said that he paints his originals to please himself. It's somebody else's problem how they come out when they're reproduced. Now, I tend to go along with that view, except where my Starblaze books are concerned. These are my babies and I insist that they be done right. I've screamed more about these covers than I did about my own book, and the reproduction is much better. On the other hand, my prints are still better than the covers on the Starblaze books, because I have absolute control over how they're done.

THURST: When you see a work of science fiction art, by someone other than yourself, how do you view it—more as an artist or a fan?

FREAS: I react exactly like a sixteen-year-old fan. There are several artists who just send me into ecstasy when I see their work. I had the opportunity, as a NASA artist, to look over the shoulder of Bob McCall as he was doing some sketches. I never envied anybody so much in my whole life. It was like sitting there and watching Da Vinci work in his sketchbook. This man draws machinery the way I draw people. They're literally anatomized. It's simply exquisite to watch him work. Oh, there are any number of artists whose work I admire—people like Alicia Austin, for instance. Her flow of line, her delicacy of penmanship, send me right into orbit. Eventually, after I get past the stage of just gasping at the picture, I start figuring out how the artist did it. However, that's a secondary thing; the important thing is the pure enjoyment I get out of the work.

THRUST: What is the secret, if there is one, of your success in the field, as opposed to so many other struggling artists who are trying to simply make ends meet?

FREAS: It's hard to say. My own feeling is that the only special thing I have going for me is that I'm first and foremost a fan. I've been called a "thorough-going professional" in my approach to my work. Well, I am. I'm professional in everything except, perhaps, the business side of it. I leave that to my wife, Polly, who is much more adept. I know lots of other fan artists who work just as hard, who want to do a good job as much as I do, but who, for one reason or another, haven't made it. In those cases, I suppose the only real difference between them and me is the period in which I got my start. I owe my beginnings to Virgil Finlay, Hannes Bok, Ed Cartier, Earl Bergey. These people were educated men to begin with. They had a broad education. They were well-read in a variety of fields. None of them were specialists. They specialized only in the sense that they drew pictures. Cartier, for example, had a very distinctive style. Nobody, including me, has ever been able to imitate it successfully; and believe me, I've tried. I admired his work more than anybody else in this period. When Cartier dropped out, somebody had to take his place. I wanted to do drawings like Cartier. I couldn't, though. But in trying, I developed my own style of light-hearted cartooning. It's Kelly Freas, but if you look carefully, you'll see the Cartier influence as clear as day. The same thing was true of Finlay. We were, in one sense, more interested in the opportunity to do the pictures than we were in the pay that we received for them. None of us, though, were concerned with expressing ourselves in our art. This is one of the major problems of today's artists. They feel a need for self-expression, which is not part of the job. The thing that needs expression is the idea, the author's story. How you express it may take several forms. But self-expression has no place in illustration.

THRUST: Can your art be said to contain a "message" of any sort?

FREAS: Yes. The message in my art is the story that I'm trying to illustrate. Any picture I do has to be better if you know the story it illustrates. And if the reader enjoys it more, that makes it a better picture. As far as I'm concerned, that's the ultimate objective. If the reader happens to be educated in the process, that's gravy. One thing that the picture should do, I think, is give the reader a boost. It should lift him out of his everyday life. It should make him feel better, not worse. It shouldn't scare him, bug him, or disgust him. It should please him!

THRUST: If someone asked you to describe a Kelly Freas painting, how would you do so?

FREAS: Oh, that's a tough one. I've often felt that

what makes a style is the sum total of the errors that the artist hasn't yet solved, hasn't been able to solve, perhaps because he's unaware of them. Of course, any problem that you become aware of, that awareness is three-quarters of the solution. Perhaps the real thing that ties my work together is the awareness that there's always a problem that hasn't yet been solved. There's still some place to go in each painting. However, I can't ever successfully do the same thing twice which, I suppose, is a very unprofessional admission. It always astonishes me, though, when I can look at a dozen of my paintings and see that they do have a common denominator. To me, each one represents a different problem and yet they have a certain consistency to them. Whatever that is, though, I can't really tell you, unless it's just blood and sweat.

THRUST: Certainly, one prominent characteristic of your work is your distinctive use of color. Do you, for example, have a particular view of color that you could put into words?

FREAS: I think so. Color is, as you suggest, quite central to my work. I often tell groups of art students, for instance, that you don't paint light, you paint with light. This attitude is fundamental to my whole approach to color. It's one of the things, of course, that makes it almost impossible to get perfect reproduction is to print with perfectly transparent inks on glass, and then light it from behind. This would give you the entire range of contrasts that would permit you to get the tonality of the light. Even with the artist's pigments, there are lots of things that you can't do. For instance, there's no such thing as a really good red. The nearest you can get to it is a red that's produced in Belgium and costs around \$14 a tube. If you buy a standard four-inch tube of this red, you'll be able to use it for the next ten years. It's so intense, so permanent, that it dominates any mixture. Color, of course, is extremely important to me, mainly because so much of my work involves covers. It's also very important to think in terms of values of light and shade, even when you're painting with color. The more things you know about the chemical qualities of color, the light reflective qualities of color, the way it's used in various reproductive schemes, the better pictures you'll be able to produce and the better effects you'll be able to achieve. In my case, I have no innate sense of color. Everything I know about color, I've learned by studying it.

THRUST: From your perspective, what makes for a successful piece of science fiction illustration?

FREAS: Basically, it should open your mind to a world that you've never experienced before. It's probably the artist's equivalent of what Sam Moskowitz called "the sense of wonder." You must somehow get a feeling of the lack of limitation. Moreover, the focus ought to be essentially human. It can be an alien, but it must be an alien with which you can identify. There must be a human element in the painting in order to evoke an emotional response. I'll be damned if I can imagine anybody getting an emotional response out of a bunch of nuts-and-bolts, except, maybe, an engineer. There also has to be something that defines the picture as being science fictional in nature. It's usually a spaceship or a bit of gadgetry, but it might be an alien landscape or just a different sky pattern. Whatever it is, though, it most assuredly can't be mundane.

THRUST: You've mentioned that, on occasion, you've found it desirable to build models to test the efficacy of ideas or concepts expressed by an author.

Why do you resort to model building as an artistic device?

FREAS: Basically, my models are inspired by my desire to try to understand what it is the author is trying to accomplish. For example, I once had a situation in which a man was standing in a desert under three suns: a red, a yellow, and a blue sun. Just try to visualize the shadow pattern! So, what I did was to take a small artist's manikin, pose him properly, build a table-top landscape, illuminate it with three spotlights, with a gelatin filter on each, and then photograph it. Well, the photographs were absolutely useless, because the colors had no resemblance to reality. So, I finally set it up and went ahead and painted it from life. The model was reasonably useful. However, after spending all this time on the model, I had very little time left to finish the actual painting. Even with all this experimentation, I never went into it as deeply as I would have liked. I would have liked to do considerably more study of the problem. Actually, there are only about a dozen or so paintings of double suns or triple suns. Chesley Bonestell has done some, as has Ron Miller—both quite effectively, I might add.

THRUST: In the past, you've had a lot to say about the whole question of art for art's sake. Your views are especially interesting, since they come from an artist. How do you view art in that context?

FREAS: Basically, I think the whole idea of art for art's sake is roughly equivalent to mudpies for the sake of mudpies. Hell, you don't cook for the sake of cooking; you cook for the sake of eating. Art without function is simply a form of intellectual masturbation. It can't have any validity unless it involves more than simply the artist producing it. If you're doing art for art's sake, then it's merely a form of self-expression. And, as I've said, I don't believe in art as a form of self-expression. There's no great artist in history, in this country or any other country, who didn't do his work for a damn good reason. And his work lives for that damn good reason, because it related to his people, his culture, his times. It was understood, and it was saved. The ones they didn't understand, didn't relate to, weren't saved. To be valid, art has to be an integral expression of the culture which produced it. I think that science fiction art is as valid a part of our culture as science fiction is. I think it's one of the most important fields of literature that exists today. It may just save our silly necks. If it isn't the ideas which have been planted in the minds of young scientists, as a result of reading science fiction these last thirty years that save us, then we're not going to be saved. Science fiction, as a literature, teaches people to think beyond the obvious answers; that even when they think they have a good answer, they should turn it upside down and examine it from another perspective. As an art form, science fiction is a vital part of our culture; and science fiction art is an integral part of the package.

THRUST: Why does the art establishment, then, take such a dim view of science fiction art?

FREAS: Generally speaking, the prejudice against science fiction art is rooted in the prejudice against science fiction; it's seen as a bunch of crazy, worthless junk. That attitude is combined with the prejudice against anything that's commercial, as well as the old appellation of "mere" illustration. This view is the result of 90 to 100 years of brainwashing. There was no such thing as fine art and easel painting 100 years ago. It was an invention of the gallery. If they hadn't invented it, then why would someone go to a gallery and buy the original instead of simply

buying a commercial reproduction? The vested interest of the galleries is an obvious factor. They want to monopolize the art product. Gallery art is basically a form of social entertainment. As I see it, the skills you develop as an artist are the basic tools you bring to your art as an illustrator. I don't think of it as "mere" illustration. I view it more as "mere" easel painting. However, the problem is less acute today than it was a decade or so ago. Today, there are several galleries which specialize in science fiction art. I think that this is a very good thing. Hopefully, it will break the ice with the art establishment.

THRUST: What is the difference, if there is one, between science fiction art and science fiction illustration?

FREAS: Superficially, there might not appear to be any significant difference. However, the basic difference is witnessed in the attitude that's brought to the job. An easel painter, when asked to capture an alien on canvas, would approach the task from an essentially "artistic" point of view, everything out of his own head. The science fiction illustrator, on the other hand, is interested in more than simply the art aspect. He wants to know much more about the environment itself. What sort of place does this alien come from? What is the nature of the alien? Is the alien on his own planet? All of these questions figure prominently in the mind of the science fiction illustrator. To the mere artist, they're relatively unimportant. I don't know what it will take to make science fiction art "respectable." However, once we get over that hurdle, everything else will just follow. But there is a danger there, too. We may find ourselves so respectable that we become "mainstream" in the process. If that happens, then we'll be right back to where we were in the 1950's, when nobody had ever dreamed of the word science fiction, but everybody was writing it.

THRUST: Does a science fiction artist have any specific responsibility to his readers?

FREAS: Yes, very much so. It's quite difficult, however, to put into words, mainly because an artist's responsibility is really no different than any good professional's responsibility to his audience. If you consider yourself a science fiction artist, then you should certainly accept the disciplines of science fiction art. You should understand its major assumptions about the universe. And you should know enough about the audience to know what it expects from the artist. It's all very well to say that you should educate the audience to liking what you want to paint, but that's really the frosting on the cake. First, you have a service to perform. Unfortunately, we're drifting away from this notion of service. We need to regain the notion of work as a major component of our obligation to our culture. It's absolutely dishonest for an artist, who knows nothing about science fiction, to go into the field and do science fiction covers simply because he can sell them to other people who don't know anything about science fiction. That may be good commercial sense, but it sure as hell isn't good science fiction.

THRUST: How important is it to be artistically logical and consistent in your work?

FREAS: I am sometimes logical, but I'm almost never consistent. I hope, though, that I'm rational. The rationality of science fiction art, or any art for that matter, is a rationality that includes the proper attitude toward the work itself. Art is a total involvement, really. I don't see how you can do science fiction scene unless you're involved in that world. That involvement is a vital part of capturing the totality of the world you're trying to create.

THRUST: What is the secret of making the unknown, known, in such a way that the viewer can relate to it?

FREAS: It's important to give the viewer enough solid information that is familiar to him so that he can use this information as a bridge to the unknown. The further out the idea is, the more precisely and realistically it must be portrayed. For example, the more incredible the alien in appearance, the more photographically he should be painted. Something identifiable should be included so that the viewer can proceed from the known to the unknown with minimum difficulty. He should be able to identify something he knows and understands as a bridge to feeling and appreciating something new and strange.

THRUST: Can you say something about the genesis of a project—a book cover, for example? How does the project unfold?

FREAS: Certainly. First, I read the manuscript as any reader would read it—namely, for pure enjoyment. Then I read it a second time with a sketch book in hand, making notations of visuals that appeal to me. If there are any special scenes, I will often do a small doodle, which is enough to remind me of the scene. Now, I will decide on what the cover subject is going to be. If I have to do some black and whites, I'll usually plot them out first, and then decide on the cover. If I don't, then I'll go directly into the cover, and do several sketches. Now, I go back with my sketches and check the story again for details. By this time, I've sketched a very detailed little painting, usually around 5" x 7" in size. Then I put this into the projector and blow it up to the actual size of the proposed painting. After that, I'll stick it on the easel and start painting, usually with the miniature pinned up in one corner. It's a rather straight-forward operation. A vast percentage of time is usually spent on research and worry, with far less time spent on the actual painting.

THRUST: Do you ever worry that you might run out of ideas—that your creativity might run dry?

FREAS: Oh, not more than twenty-four times a day. There's almost no job, during which, at some point, I'm not absolutely convinced that I'll never do another decent painting as long as I live; that I'm completely out of ideas; that I absolutely can't draw, can't paint, and don't know what to do. After I get through all that, I go ahead and finish the job.

THRUST: Do you paint with a particular audience in mind?

FREAS: I'm so much a typical member of my audience that I can paint for myself and know that the audience will react almost exactly as I do. I'm the absolute epitome of the man in the street, heaven help me.

THRUST: Is there ever a danger, when you become as successful as you are, that you'll fall victim to the lure of formulaized painting—that is, paint the same thing that works over and over again?

FREAS: That's a serious problem for most commercial illustrators. It's the problem that drives them out of the business. In the old days, there were some people who changed their styles virtually every time they changed their necktie. A good example was Alex Ross. Another was Al Dorn. Of the more contemporary illustrators, a good example is Mark English, although at one point he established a style that was so definitely his own, that he literally ran himself out of the business. At that point, all you can do is grow a beard, paint a new portfolio, change your name, and start going around to new agencies. Another good example is Bob Peak, who evolved

a style that was so popular that everybody and his brother picked it up. All the advertisers wanted Bob Peak-style illustrations, but they didn't want to pay Bob Peak prices. That's another thing that can drive you out of the business; you must be on guard not to price yourself out of the market. Fortunately, it's almost impossible for this to happen in the science fiction field, although a few artists have succeeded in establishing a stylistic approach that they can repeat over and over again. But that sort of thing rarely happens. Most artists have to constantly adapt to changing audience needs.

THRUST: When you finish a painting, are you generally satisfied with the final product, or are you always somewhat dissatisfied?

FREAS: Both. I always know that it's the best I could do at the time. I don't let it out of the studio unless it is. That's why I still have several pictures sitting around the house. Fortunately, it doesn't happen too often, probably not more than two or three times a year. When that happens, I'll get right down to the wire with a picture and then scrap it and start over again. So, whatever goes out of the studio, is the best I could do at the time. At the same time, though, I'm never completely satisfied. I'm always looking for those things that could be improved.

THRUST: When you see a piece of your work do the mistakes jump out at you?

FREAS: God Almighty, do they ever! Yes, clearly and visibly, like bright neon signs.

THRUST: Do you ever get the feeling that you would like to take back some of your work that has been published and redo it in light of what you know now?

FREAS: Yes, but I haven't done it. I'm Daddy to the idiot-children as well as the geniuses. You can't just throw them away because you don't like them. They belong to you just the same. They're yours, and you must assume responsibility for them.

THRUST: Do you enjoy being a part of the science fiction world? Do you like being with science fiction fans?

FREAS: Yes, tremendously so. Like most science fiction fans, I regard the science fiction community as an extended family. I have friends in that community all over the world. This is one of the real rewards of the field. Whenever I go, I make new friends. It's a real joy!

THRUST: Finally, when you have the time, what other kinds of things do you enjoy doing when you're not painting?

FREAS: What spare time? All kidding aside, I have very little free time. What little I do have, I like to spend reading. I'm an omnivorous and insatiable reader. I'm also a classical music buff. Ordinarily, I have my stereo going about eighteen hours a day. I'm also interested in theatre. However, my performing days are long since gone. There's just not enough time in the day. I also like sculpting, woodcarving, and modeling. I used to build all my own picture frames, but I don't have time anymore. Unfortunately, there's practically no time for anything other than my work and, perhaps, going to conventions.



Pitching Pennies Against The Starboard Bulkhead

a speculation of sf writers

Michael Bishop

A few years ago a book appeared entitled An Exaltation of Larks, which exhumed and rejuvenated a number of beautiful and/or droll terms applicable to members of various animal species en masse. Almost everyone has heard of a pride of lions, of course, but few of us at that time had ever encountered the striking expression "an exaltation of larks" to designate a full-throated flock of that particular species of songbird. I do not own a copy of the book, and my memory is wretched, but I might take a stab at proffering "a pomp of peacocks" and "a fragrance of polecats" as two additional examples. I'm undoubtedly way off the mark, though, and I trust that some of you who know the book will inundate the editor of this magazine with bonafide examples of your own.

In truth, my topic this time encroaches only peripherally on the territory of larks, peacocks, and polecats. What I've assembled, rather, is a quartet of essayettes (Steven Utley's happy coinage) on some colleagues of mine whose work I admire. "A speculation of sf writers," if you will although many might prefer "a BEM of visionaries" (all sorts of ugly connotations there) or even "a quark of extrapolationists" or perhaps...But you can think of far more appropriate examples of your own, and I wish you would.

These pieces were originally commissioned by Dr. Curtis C. Smith of the University of Houston at Clear Lake City for a book entitled Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Writers tentatively scheduled to be published in 1981 by Macmillan. I have altered them all slightly for their appearance in Thrust.

1. Gardner Dozois

On the basis of only fifteen or so pieces of short fiction, an uneven but energetic novel-length collaboration, and one beautifully evocative novel of foredoomed love on an alien world, Gardner Dozois has built an enviable reputation for excellence both as wordsmith and storyteller. Robert Silverberg, in his introduction to The Visible Man, has declared Dozois "one of the most gifted writers in the United States," a judgment which would seem to stand him in the company not only of Gene Wolfe and Kate Wilhelm but also of any number of big-name "mainstream" practitioners. And I would second this judgment.

A fine introduction to Dozois's fiction is the novelette "A Special Kind of Morning," chosen by Silverberg to lead off the first number of his anthology series New Dimensions. Dozois, working with such "traditional" sf materials as planetwide warfare and the deployment of exotic weaponry, upends tradition by framing a cadenced and moving tale whose moral force is as startling as the freshness of

its language. On the world called World, one of many planets where economics and politics enforce a complex caste system deriving from institutionalized bio-engineering, the narrator (and protagonist) confronts his own humanity in the person of a dazed, sexless "null"; he comes, thereby, to a harrowing understanding of life, death, and his place in the cosmic scheme.

An early passage in this novelette, incidentally, provides a succinct response to those peculiarly blinkered souls who insist on interpreting Dozois's every story as a descent into an inferno of unremitting futility and despair: "Pessimism's just the common-sense knowledge that there's more ways for something to go wrong than for it to go right...As for futility, everybody dies the true death eventually...The philosophical man accepts both as constants and then doesn't let them bother him any."

"The Last Day of July," a less immediately accessible story than "A Special Kind of Morning," is in many ways more representative of the Dozois canon, although just as praiseworthy. Devoid of the recognizable trappings of sf (starships, aliens, and whatnot), relentlessness in its creation of mood, "The Last Day of July" has the inevitability of a horror story by Poe and the psychological verisimilitude of a tale by Henry James. Many readers overlook the fact that its acute naturalistic detail and its unsentimental chronicling of a man undergoing breakdown prestage an upbeat, if decidedly ambiguous, ending. The story's memorable concluding line is "There will be a crop" -- for the "seeding" of the protagonist into another continuum has apparently taken, and only the most myopic or hidebound among us may assume this enigmatic continuum inferior in potential to our own.

Among his short fiction Dozois also expresses particular fondness for "A Kingdom by the Sea," an allegory about the odd but unforgettable lilt of a slaughterhouse worker; "Flash Point," in which an inexplicable variety of spontaneous combustion serves as metaphor for the spiritual contamination of a small Maine community; and "Chains of the Sea," wherein Dozois again plays with a traditional way. Each of the remaining seven stories in the Visible Man invites, and rewards, additional readings. Like John Varley's The Persistence of Vision, the collection is a benchmark not only in the author's career but in the development of science fiction in the seventies.

Nightmare Blue, a collaboration with George Alec Efringer, Dozois himself describes as "quite literally a potboiler." Developed from an early unpublished work of Dozois's entitled Dangeld, it functions both as a pastiche of hardboiled Raymond Chandler detective stories and as a rock'em sock'em sci-fi thriller.

Nightmare Blue is frequently amusing but only rarely believable. The structure of the book and many of the scenes featuring the alien Corcaill Sendijen are Dozois's particular contributions to this effort.

To date, the only solo novel to appear from Dozois's pen is the remarkable *Strangers*, expanded from the 1974 novella of the same title. (At this writing, he is still at work on a long-promised sf novel provisionally entitled *Nottamuntown*.) Dozois acknowledges his indebtedness to Philip Jose Farmer's *The Lovers*, itself an expansion of an earlier work, by calling his Teutonic protagonist Joseph Farber. The story details Farber's star-crossed love affair and marriage with a rebellious young woman of a nonhuman species called the Clan on the world Weinunnach. To this difficult theme Dozois brings not only his empathetic understanding of human motives but the rare ability to create credible alien cultural forms. Inlaid with a genuine tragic dimension and recounted in a prose as rhythmic and vivid as the best poetry, *Strangers* is science fiction's *Romeo and Juliet*.

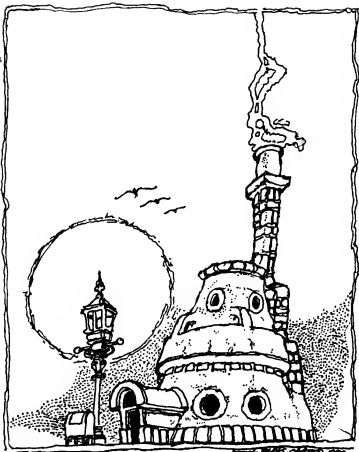
Of late Dozois has devoted much of his time to compiling unusual and distinctive best-of-the-year and theme anthologies, alone or in collaboration with Jack Dann. He has also published some criticism, notably a seminal essay on the fiction of James Tiptree, Jr. However, so prodigious are his talents as storyteller and novelist, the field will be crucially diminished if he ever decides to channel all his creative energies into these important but secondary pursuits. Perhaps the eventual publication of *Nottamuntown* will signal an explosive and revitalizing dam-burst of fiction writing.

11. Suzette Haden Elgin

Principally known for her novels featuring the exploits of Tri-Galactic agent Coyote Jones, Suzette Haden Elgin brings to her science fiction a solid academic grounding in linguistics and a strong personal interest in both poetry and music. She is adept at infusing with piquant social satire and genuine human emotion her deliberately grandiose spoofs of the James Bond school of superspy fiction so popular in the 1960s. If she has any immediately recognizable signature as a novelist, in fact, it may be her tactic of dealing seriously with universal human problems in a parodic or sometimes even farcical context. Although this technique poses the very real danger of trivializing important concerns, Elgin is generally successful in using it to place contemporary cultural situation in a fresh and therefore edifying perspective.

"For the Sake of Grace," a novelette later incorporated into *At the Seventh Level*, was not only Elgin's first story to embody a decidedly "feminist" theme but also her first professionally published fiction. It posits a society in which quasi-Islamic attitudes toward the status of women prevail, the most esteemed profession is Poetry, and any female who unsuccessfully attempts to enter this profession (by taking but failing a computer-administered exam) dooms herself to life-long solitary confinement within the cloisters of her own disgrace household. Jacinth, a talented 12-year old girl, perturbs the affairs of her potty and unimaginative father, the Khadilh, by challenging for this honor. A remarkably effective feature of Elgin's storytelling strategy here is that although the Khadilh is her point-of-view character, Jacinth utterly dominates the narrative. What is more amazing, she takes center-stage only in the tale's moving penultimate paragraph.

(Joanna Russ's 1978 novel *The Two of Them*, incidentally, is dedicated to Elgin because Elgin "generously allowed me to use the characters and setting of her short story, 'For the Sake of Grace,' as a springboard to a very different story of my own." The planet which Elgin calls Abba in *At the Seventh Level* --



after the rhyming pattern of a quatrain much in use by its Poets -- becomes Ka'abah in Russ's transmutation of characters, plot elements, and themes. Remember Mecca, readers!)

The Communipaths, a novella originally published as one half of an Ace Double, introduces Elgin's recurring protagonist Coyote Jones. With fiery red hair and a beard to match, Coyote is the Continental Op sheared of his cynicism, Phillip Marlowe with his consciousness raised, and James Bond writ human -- once, that is, you overlook the fact that he is also a "mass projective telepath" capable of inciting entire planetary populations to riot and revolution. Further, in a future where "mind-speech" is commonplace, he is impervious to the projection of others. This linking of Coyote's rare mental talent with a handicap equally rare among his Thirty-First-Century contemporaries provides Elgin with a rather too handy lever for both comic relief and *deus ex machina* resolutions. Nevertheless, Coyote remains an engaging and often admirable creation, one whom Elgin has permitted to grow and change from novel to novel.

In *The Communipaths* a baby born to a member of a religious sect called the Maklunites shows overwhelming telepathic potential. Coyote must remove it from its people so that it may one day take its place on a kind of patriotic bucket brigade, passing messages mind to mind across the Three Galaxies. Because children taken for this duty invariably die before reaching twenty, Coyote repudiates his involvement and attempts to join the Maklunites. Elgin, testing the waters as a novelist and employing a shifting point of view, brings Coyote to the fore so infrequently that her story often seems to lack a unifying focus.

Further, by following Coyote's progress at closer hand, solves this problem. It also contains some of Elgin's most vivid descriptive writing, a

fascinating if somewhat implausible alien society, and a moving love story. It was originally published as an Ace Science Fiction Special.

Consisting of a novella and three related shorter works, *At the Seventh Level* puts Coyote on the planet Abba for the purpose of rescuing the Poet Jacinth, now a full-grown woman, from what appears to be a plot to poison her. Elgin has complained that although this book "was taken up as some sort of militant feminist work, what I thought I was doing was a parody of American economics and law." She cites in particular the fact that thieves on Abba constitute a legitimate guild and that a variety of crimes are permissible in the proper forms have been filled out.

Finally, *Star-Anchored, Star-Angered* again pits Coyote against the devotees of a religion for whose leader and tenets he comes to develop an abiding reverence. Indeed, he comes to love the female messiah who performs a startlingly beautiful miracle in order to convince him of her authenticity. Interesting theological speculation and a convincing apportionment of humorous and tragic elements make this novel perhaps the most aesthetically successful of the Coyote Jones "adventures" since my own favorite, *Furthest*.

Elgin is currently at work on a fantasy trilogy involving Ozark and Appalachian folklore, and she does not plan to abandon Coyote Jones. An omnibus volume containing the first three novels in this series is apparently in the works at Pocket Books. If and when it does appear, let me hazard the opinion that it would make a fine SF Book Club selection.

iii. Steven Utley

Between 1972 and 1979, with more than six dozen sales to his credit, Steven Utley established a reputation as a prolific author of short stories and novelettes, either alone or in collaboration with a number of other Texas-based writers, most notably Howard Waldrop and Lisa Tuttle. In addition to science fiction and fantasy, Utley has written detective stories, mainstream fiction for the men's magazines, book reviews, film criticism, comic-book stories, and poetry for such diverse "little" or semiprofessional magazines as *Cormudo*, *Poetry Today*, and *Shavoy*. With Geo. W. Proctor he edited a volume of sf and fantasy by Texans entitled *Lone Star Universe*, whose appearance Harlan Ellison hailed as a "watershed event." Among the pseudonyms Utley has used are S. Dale and Bruce Holt; the latter name has cropped up, in fact, as that of the protagonist in two otherwise unrelated stories published under Utley's own byline: "Outlaw Glory," a bitter mainstream effort, and the bleak sf tale "Getting Away."

Working exclusively at less-than-novel length, Utley has produced fiction either competent but undistinguished or astonishing for its inventive mordancy. At his best, his pervasive angst leavened with humor, angry wit, or local color, he has written chilling horror stories ("Ghost Seas"), scathingly funny satires ("Upstart"), outrageous pastiches ("Black as the Pit, from Pole to Pole" with Waldrop), and evocative, melancholy science fiction ("The Man at the Bottom of the Sea"). The strongest contemporary influences on Utley's development appear to be the October landscapes of Ray Bradbury, the ironic pessimism of the later Robert Silverberg, the pop-culture eclecticism of Phillip Jose Farmer, and the manic-depressive black humor of Barry Malzberg, whose style and subject matter Utley affectionately parodies in his story "Losing Streak." In one conspicuous but hardly damning sense, then, he is a writer still in the process of discovering his own voice and meter.

"Custer's Last Jump," with Waldrop as collaborator, first secured a degree of recognition for Utley's talents,

garnering a Nebula nomination and several anthology appearances. It postulates a frontier America in which the Ogala Sioux, equipped with Krupp monoplane, defeat the 7th Cavalry of George Armstrong Custer and its airborne auxiliary, the 505th Balloon Infantry. Told in earnest text-book prose, this off-the-wall *tour de force* concludes with a "Suggested Reading" list as whacky and authentic-seeming as the "historical" matter preceding it. This final bibliographic fill up may owe something to Jose Farmer's convoluted appendices in the mock-biography *Tarzan Alive* (1972).

A second Utley-Waldrop collaboration, "Black as the Pit," etc., pays homage to Farmer (again), Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and others. Its protagonist is that quintessential symbol of alienation, the Frankenstein monster, and its setting is the perilous hollow interior of the earth. Although the disparate elements of this tale do not always mesh convincingly, sheer narrative *chutzpah* often effectively disguises the fact. Like "Custer's Last Jump," it has been much discussed and anthologized.

Among Utley's solo efforts "Upstart" is a pointed, and hilarious, satire of the spacefarer-as-superman ethos in science fiction, perhaps the last word on this indefatigable idiom. "Ghost Seas," meanwhile, invokes the desolate West Texas landscape in the service of a terrifying tale of avarice and revenge. "The Man at the Bottom of the Sea" and "Goodbye," both ostensibly science fiction, demonstrate Utley's ability to dramatize, poignantly, a private sense of loss. The former is notable for a calm descriptive overlay at odds with the emotional intensity of its characters; the latter, for encoding in the form of a gone-awry love affair Utley's ambivalent feelings about time, human relationships, and perhaps even the writing of science fiction. "Goodbye" concludes with a kind of whistling-in-the-dark dedication that is heart-breaking.

Another effective story in the same mold, albeit set against the historical backdrop of World War II, is "Time and Hagakure," wherein the son of a Japanese kamikaze pilot attempts to preserve his own sanity by mediating, through time, the salvation of his doomed father. In "Getting Away" Utley makes effective use of his deep-seated interests in dinosaurs -- creatures which frequently raise their huge, anomalous heads in his fiction -- to give his protagonist a means of psychological escape from a polluted and regimented future.

In many ways Utley has been an undervalued writer, in large measure because he shows little interest in writing a novel. The fact that even his best short stories and novelettes remain uncollected has also worked to obscure his accomplishment. Lately he and Howard Waldrop have been talking desultorily about writing another spaced-out alternate-history novelette, this one involving Stephen Foster and God only knows what else. Tentative title: "O Dea Golden Spaceships."

iv. Ian Watson

"SF is founded upon the exploration of ideas, rather than stylistics. It is a community of ideas; in its sum, it composes what one might call an 'idea-myth', the idea-myth of man in the universe," wrote Ian Watson in an article entitled "The Cruditities of Science Fiction" published March, 1978, in the British fan magazine *Arena*.

That Watson should define science fiction in terms of its speculative content, with particular emphasis on myth and ontology, provides a telling gloss on both the form and the substance of his novels and stories. A former academician whose work displays not only a serious metaphysical bent but also an engaging internationalism in his choice of settings and

characters, Ian Watson vaulted to prominence in 1973 with the publication in England of The Embedding. Few novel-length debuts are so dazzling, either for their structural brilliance or for the multifaceted complexity of their intellectual speculations, and astonished reviewers responded with laudatory comparisons to the works of Arthur C. Clarke and Stanislaw Lem.

Later, writing in New Statesman, J.G. Ballard emphatically styled Ian Watson "the most interesting British sf writer of ideas -- or, more accurately, the only British sf writer of ideas." Compatriot and contemporary Christopher Priest, likewise commenting on Watson's talent for launching cerebral flights of fancy within the expansive parameters of sf, has described his novels as having "a Wagnerian quality to them, with immense clashing of intellectual bravura and cosmic event" (in Priest's Introduction to the 1978 anthology Anticipations).

One idea exploited in different guises or in subtle variations from novel to novel is Watson's strategically held "belief" that consensus reality, or the world of everyday experience, is ripe for transcendence. The means of transcending our human limitations or the prison of the physical universe may differ from one Watsonian fictional foray to the next, but the fact that there does exist a transcendent mental set or cosmic continuum to which we may or should aspire remains a conspicuous constant. Although Watson usually embeds this idea in a scrupulously rational context (often it is a research project or a scientific mission), a strong element of the primordial or the mystical (from metalinguistics to Surrealism) and his several restatements of the concept a rich and endlessly ramifying ambiguity. Indeed, Watson is especially adept at legitimizing the paranormal with the argot of technological discourse. Good examples of this technique include not only the fine recent short stories "The Very Slow Time Machine" and "The Rooms of Paradise," but the mind-bogglingly open-ended novel Miracle Visitors, whose concluding sentence, rendered almost after the fashion of a haiku or a koan, points directly to the metaphysical beyond with which Watson is so obsessed: "Somewhere else / Khidr smiled."

The structural complexity of Watson's work almost certainly stems from his preoccupation with ideas. In The Embedding, for instance, the agency for arriving at the freedom and omnipotence of "Other-Reality" is language, a distilled grammar of perception permitting its speakers to encompass "This-Reality" psychobiologically and to transcend it. Language, then, is the unifying element. The Embedding, complicated, threepart plot. First, in an English hospital group of Pakistani orphans are learning artificial languages as "probes at the frontiers of mind." Second, a French anthropologist in the Amazon is studying a tribe of Indians whose use of a local drug enables them to alter their day-to-day language into an otherwise incomprehensible embedded language of transcendent perception and control. And, finally, an alien race called the Sp'thra, whose name means "Signal Traders," arrive on Earth and, as part of their ongoing "language inventory" of the galaxy, ask for six living human brains programmed with six different terrestrial grammars. By this inventory the Sp'thra hope to escape "This-Reality" for the ineffable "Other-Reality" now inhabited by a transcendent alien species called the "Change Speakers." Watson's ending, interestingly, is both apocalyptic and enigmatic.

His next two novels follow a somewhat similar pattern. In The Jonah Kit, escape from this illusory universe lies within the grasp only of the world's whales. By forming a "Thought Star" -- a cetacean

computer whose living components reach out with their minds to an alternate continuum -- and by later committing mass suicide, these self-aware sea beasts abstract themselves from the homocentric madness of man. In The Martian Inca, on the other hand, transcendence derives from a viral activator in the soil of Mars. This mysterious catalyst triggers a dormant genetic program for releasing the superhuman in every adult representative of the species -- but humanity, in the person of a bourgeois American astronaut, resists the transformation and the novel ends on a decidedly downbeat note. Although as complex and inventive as The Embedding, each of these books casts a dark and somewhat fatalistic spell.

Between the publication of The Martian Inca and the appearance of Allen Embassy, and interesting change apparently took place in Watson's thinking. His fourth novel -- besides boasting his most appealing protagonist, Lila Makind, who also narrates the story -- is noteworthy for framing the moral dilemma of a young African woman who sees the conscious formulation of humanity's next evolutionary step as a betrayal of the species as it exists at present. Watson cannily dramatizes the poignancy of Lila's dilemma even as he establishes forceful arguments for the necessity of society's taking the step that so appalls her. Although beyond is better, getting there may entail fearful hardships and the cruelty of institutionalized deceit. A departure from, as well as a recognizable sequel to, his previous work, Allen Embassy shows Watson opting for a hard-nosed humanistic compassion for his characters. For just that reason, it may be his most moving novel to date.

Miracle Visitors, perhaps an even more structurally complex novel than The Embedding, partakes of this same authorial generosity and openmindedness. Here Watson's presiding metaphor for transcendence is the phenomenon of the UFO experience, which, because it manifests itself to different characters in different ways, establishes at least three separate subjective "realities" within the novel's conceptual framework. Imagine a Philip K. Dick novel sustained by undiluted intellectual rigor, and you have some idea of the tone and the narrative effects of Miracle Visitors. Its most striking bravura passage details a trip to the moon in a Ford Thunderbird. Although an intrinsically whacky, if not downright dumb, concept, Watson handles it with admirable pokerfaced dexterity -- just as he does the psychological portraiture of his principal characters (even if the major part of his own sympathy seems to lie with the consciousness researcher, John Deacon). The book's final lines, "Somewhere else/ Khidr smiled," are therefore a kind of password phrase hinting at both the reality and the bewilderment of Watson's hoped-for transcendence. They also provide a clue to his own aesthetic orientation to the problem of demonstrable human limitations: the desire to know what some have labeled unknowable, Watson implies, is precisely what makes us human.

This is a novel to put with the very best ever written in this field, and it has been shamefully overlooked, or only superficially read, by the vast majority of sf aficionados in this country. To be fair however, three American reviewers -- the Panshins and Spider Robinson -- did recognize and trumpet the book's merit upon its initial appearance here. Unfortunately, it seems to me today that not many of you were listening.

Watson's other books include The Very Slow Time Machine, a collection of short stories, and two more novels, God's World (1979) and The Gardens of Delight (1980). The former Watson describes as "a kind of companion novel to Miracle Visitors," although Collance, his English publishers, describe it as "his first novel of outer space"; like all of his work, however, it has a complex metaphysical dimension, this

time framing a detailed exploration of what a society might be like if the "sacred" -- i.e., God and a variety of other hieratic beings and concepts -- routinely made itself manifest in that society's day-to-day history. (Is there any other sf writer alive today who would even attempt such an ambitious undertaking?) As for *The Gardens of Delight*, it is set on a world based on a famous triptych by the medieval Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch. It will have an American edition from Pocket Books / Simon & Schuster, and I am looking forward to reading it.

Recently Watson has collaborated at novel-length with an American writer by the name of Michael Bishop.

Their joint effort is entitled *Under Heaven's Bridge* (not to be confused with Greg Bear's *Beyond Heaven's River*, which also features a Japanese protagonist and which has already undoubtedly appeared on the news-stands), and it is currently looking for a home and may indeed have found one by now. Although not perhaps as successful as the best solo efforts of these two writers -- collaborating across a body of water as large as the Atlantic poses hazards similar to ballooning across it -- *Under Heaven's Bridge* has its moments. Watson and his American counterpart (a rather small "speculation of sf writers") urge you to keep your eyes open for it.

(NOTE: What follows is the corrected version of Michael Bishop's column from last issue, part II. The version printed last issue had various sections out of order. The editor humbly apologises for the mistake. -DDF/)

"O, to be a Blurb!"

--Michael Bishop

11. A Special Kind of Blurb

It was that night, I think, that Time, Space, and Circumstance conspired to saddle me with one overruling ambition -- to become a Blurb.

(Let me confess, incidentally, that this account say well collapse several subsequent trips to the Mallmark Temple of Tacky into a single phantasmagoric rendering of my mythopoeic initial visit. No matter. What I record here, despite the anomalous copyrights of a few of the Ace Science Fiction Specials mentioned hereafter, is as faithful to the facts, in a spiritual or metaphysical way, as Genesis.)

Yes, a Blurb. Even if only for a few paltry minutes out of each twenty-four-hour period, I wanted to be a Blurb.

I agh to recollect my first beholding and reverent hefting of the Holy Books arrayed before me. Such moments come only once in your life; or twice, or thrice, or maybe even four or five times. If you suffer from sinus and hanker after satori. For me, however, the experience was unique.

The paperbacks I ogled and fondled, fatted and ogled, included Philip K. Dick's *The Preserving Machine*, R.A. Lafferty's *Fourth Mansions*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Alexei Panshin's *Site of Tomorrow*, Bob Shaw's *The Two-Flowers*, Keith Roberts' *Pavane*, and Joanna Russ' *Picnic on Paradise*. Each book was sanctified with the Ace Science Fiction Special imprimatur and a Leo & Diane Dillon cover. Prices ranged from sixty to ninety-five cents; and, rather than inaccurate, gosh-wow synopses, their back covers bore up to four intelligent-sounding favorable assessments, one after another in discrete vehicles, by well-known science-fiction writers other than the authors of the Specials themselves. In other words, *blurbs*.

This was undeniably classy. I dug it.

(A few years later I was stunned to learn that Ace's packaging of these distinguished series, originally under the editorship of Terry Carr, had by no means ensured spectacular sales. Whether this heresy has a factual basis I still don't know -- but it seems likely. I remember the dismay and disappointment I felt when an old high-school friend of mine told me in a letter that he considered the Dillon covers "pretentious." Not for him their bold black outlines and cubistic stylings; instead, give him, any day, spacehips, BEMs, and voluptuous Amazonas.)

For instance, of Philip K. Dick's *The Preserving Machine* Anthony Boucher had written, "You'll find reflections of our instability in these glimpses of the future, plus one of Dick's most characteristic qualities: the chilling symbolism of absolute nightmare." In the course of a paragraph-long prose poem John Brunner referred to Dick as the "most consistently brilliant sf writer in the world," and Marlan Ellison contributed a verse that simultaneously categorized Dick's quirky talent and displayed to good advantage the breadth and erudition of his own literary grounding. I quote this Blurb in full: "If there is such a thing as 'black science fiction,' Philip K. Dick is its Pirandello, its Beckett and its Plinter. No other creative intellect qualifies."

On Lafferty's book were lovely fanfares by Paul

Anderson, Roger Zelazny, and Alexei Panshin; on Le Guin's, garlands strewn by Herbert, Moorcock, and Knight; on Panshin's, pizzicato squibs by Elton, Brunner, and Silverberg; on Russ', raves from Belber, Sturgeon, and Anderson again; on Shaw's, piquant shishkabobs served up by Trauser, del Ray, and the ebullient Ellison; and on Roberts', rhapsodic recommendations from three magazines and a succinct bit of praise from Brian W. Aldiss. "A rare and beautiful novel," wrote Aldiss of *Pavane*, which had appeared earlier in England.

Despite my lightly mocking rhetoric here (a "pizzicato squib" is probably an impossible animal), that night I intuitively realized that Blurbers were well on the road to becoming the Fests of Free-Enterprise Publishing. I hoped, one day, to count myself among their number. Like the Black Mountain disciples of Charles Olson, they didn't have to know a damn thing about ryming (if the didn't want to, that is), and concision was a necessity rather than a sign of failing imagination. In short, I had stumbled upon a literary form with all the earmarks of a life-long métier -- if only I could induct myself into the ranks of those who are regularly called upon to blurb. The major obstacle to obtaining this status I perceived at once: The Blurb must possess a reputation for manufacturing (or, in some cases, consuming) the very sort of product in need of his expert testimonials.

A Blurb must be somebody, even if it is a lower-case somebody. I feel certain that Edly Dickinson never made it as a Blurb because she had no desire to "KNEE-deep, KNEE-deep!" before an admiring bog. She actively eschewed Somebodyhood. Good for her.

Nevertheless, as on those Miller Light Beer T/ ads, lower-case somebodies occasionally vault briefly into public view bearing superimposed subtitles to legitimize their status as Blurbers: "Alonso Hagley Guzman, Famous Former Ad Alai Flayer." Similarly, you sometimes get book recommendations from otherwise obscure scientists or Ph.D.'s identified only by their intimidating titles and accomplishments, as for instance, "Director of Sematic Research, University of Myranam," "Award-winning author of SF as Therapy: From Adler to Zelig." But Alonso Guzman isn't really in Book Focality League, and the esteemed Director of Sematic Research has only a sliver of the authority accruing to Samuel R. Delany....

Shivering in the Mallmark gift shop, inhaling the faint aroma of blinding glue, I knew I wanted to be a Blurb of the first water. Besides, it was unlikely that I would ever become an expert in semantics, seismology, or psychiatrics. If I wanted to blurb, I must first forge a career as a science-fiction writer. And that that entailed more hard work than I had bargained for. Eventually, several years hence, my reward would be a life of indolent reading punctuated by either apollonian or dionysian bouts of blurring, my degree of self-control or -abandon to be determined, of course, by the work then undergoing enlurment.

In 1969, at age twenty-three, I thought Blurbers were paid for their efforts. (Ha ha ha ha ha....)



CAVIARY

George Alec Effinger

All right, settle down. Those of you who came in late, just get the assignment from somebody else. We have a lot of ground to cover, and I want to get started.

First off, this column is a continuation of a column which began in Carl Bennett's SCINTILLATION of fond memory. The name "Caviary" comes from Shakespeare, and if you locate its context you will discover that along with ironic wit it implies a certain amount of exasperation.

So here I am in THRUST, and I'd like to thank the editor for giving me the chance to further the causes of literacy and Neo-Eclecticism. It is my burden to demonstrate that these causes are not mutually antagonistic. I must carry on this battle virtually alone because of the scarcity of other Neo-Eclectic writers in the sf field, and the fact that among these are pitifully few people capable of expressing a coherent thought.

Well, then. What am I going to talk about? I want to start by talking about bowling. Several years ago, as the guest of honor at a convention in Pittsburgh, I drew a parallel between science fiction and baseball. It seemed an unlikely way to begin a speech, but after a while the central rightness of my comparison persuaded even the most dubious of my listeners. Today, of course, the idea has become commonplace, until you hear such disparate authors as Stanton A. Coblenz and Lisa Tuttle going on about how wonderfully similar science fiction and baseball are. It is becoming tedious, and I'm sorry I started the whole thing in the first place.

Consequently, it is time to move on. How clearly I recall that day in 1960. I was thirteen years old, in the eighth grade, young and sharp and innocent. On Saturday mornings I bowled in a league at Fla-Mor lanes, not many blocks from my house in Cleveland. On my team was an older

man — well, he seemed that way to me then, but now I realize that he could not have been better than seventeen, still ungraduated from high school — an older man named Byron. I was keeping score and I noticed that on this particular Saturday morning Byron was six frames into a Dutch 200 game. Those of you who don't know what a Dutch 200 game is haven't been keeping up with your reading. In the previous frame he had picked up a six-ten spare, and so he needed a strike to keep the string going. I watched him closely, tensely, filled with wonder and excitement. He moved to the foul line in his graceful five-step approach, set the ball down over the first arrow, dropping it so smoothly there was barely a sound. The ball swung out, toward the gutter (for a few years the bowling proprietors tried to get us to call the gutter a "channel," but the hell with that. They tried to get us to call the alleys "lanes," too, but after a while they gave up and instead covered all their pool tables with decorator colors) and then made its typical massive hook, diving toward the pocket. I held my breath.

The ball never made it all the way back. Byron had thrown it out just a bit too much, and the ball exploded its way through the pack of maple somewhere due west of where it ought to have been. I groaned. Byron crouched and watched. He always got terrific action on his ball, and this time the pins flew around like mad marionettes. In a moment every pin but the headpin lay stunned or spinning, and a dazed seven pin rolled forward, just as the automatic pinsetter was descending, to cut down the headpin and give Byron his strike. It was an astounding thing to see, the kind of event that renews your faith in angels.

"Hey, way to go, Byron!" I cried, blackening in the square by his name in the seventh frame.

He turned to me, and his expression surprised me. He wore the most complete, passionate look of disgust I had ever seen. He said an obscene thing, the significance of which I was as yet ignorant.

"What's wrong?" I asked. "You got your strike. You need two spares and two strikes and you got it."

"I don't even want to take that strike," he said. "It was a good strike."

"It was a lousy strike." He sat down and stared at this wimpy kid who followed him. Byron shook his head and finished my Coke by mistake.

A few weeks later Byron would punch me in the belly, sending me to the hospital and thus beginning a series of problems which plague me to this day. If I ever ran into Byron again, I don't think I'd respond with the same kind of adolescent hero worship. It is because of him that I can't even look at a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup without feeling sick.

But I owe to him my outlook toward life, toward art, and toward sf.

Let me explain it this way:

Say you write a short story. After finishing it, you read it over and realize that it's a Grade C story. Grade C translates roughly as "serviceable." Not thrilling wonder or astounding (that's Grade A). Not even up to the standards of Pretty Good Stories of Fantasy and Science Fiction (that's Grade B). But serviceable. That is to say, salable, publishable, readable, forgettable. You sell the story for enough money for dinner for two at a place where the main attraction is the free salad bar. A long time later the story appears in print. All your friends read it, and your mom, and the kid next door, and your barber who thinks L. Ron Hubbard was a better writer than John Steinbeck. So you're looking at birthday cards one day and this guy comes

up and says, "I read your story."

You say, "Oh."

"It was real great," they guy says. "I liked the part where—"

Well, you know the story wasn't great at all. It was a Grade C story from the opening line to the telegraphed surprise. But you won't persuade this maroon of that. All he can see in the story is the glittery seed of your idea, and the string of plot elements you put together like a popcorn garland on a Christmas tree. You know where you borrowed the ideas; he doesn't. You know how you cheated on the plot; he doesn't. You know that if any of the characters in the story had had the sense God gives a goose, the story would have come to a much different conclusion within a page and a half; he doesn't notice this.

The only true thing left for you to do is follow Byron. You show a weary look and say, "No, it wasn't so great." Be sure to add, "I'm glad you liked it, though." It always pays to be gracious.

To someone who cares, it isn't the strike that's important, it's the form. I imagine that Byron would rather have settled for a three pin fill and wind up perfectly poised at the foul line than fall on his nose three times running for strikes. I have the feeling that many (if not most) writers would prefer a well-formed story balanced in all its elements on an old theme than a limping turkey with a nifty gem of a new idea.

Why? I'll tell you — and this is something writers rarely tell others. Because ideas are cheap. Real cheap. Ideas are straw and good stories are gold, and all the value derives from the transmutation. You couldn't get a dime a dozen for ideas (and I'm talking good ideas, not just new twists on old ideas).

Everybody has ideas. If you don't believe me, just ask 'em. Mostly, people who have no idea how books are put together always seem to think that their lives have been so fascinating that anyone in his right mind would pay ten ninety-five just to read the story. If I had a dollar for everyone who's tried to tell me his history, I wouldn't have to work for the rest of the year. What I ought to do, it suddenly occurs to me, is to listen to these stories and charge a dollar fee. That isn't half bad.

But beyond the wonderful biography crowd there are plenty of folks with real sf ideas, brimming over with them. What they say is on the order of this:

(An sf convention. The hotel restaurant.

A table, around which sit two sf pros and three fans.)

Fan #1: So I was wondering if I ought to finish that story sometime.

Pro #1: Sure.

Fan #2: I had this idea, see, where you have this virus, you know, and it attacks the bile duct, and the people on this planet are descended from —

Fan #3: So could I send you that story? The one about John F. Kennedy going back in time and warning himself about going to Dallas by writing a secret message on that coconut shell, and they find it in the Smithsonian, and the Warren Commission —

Pro #2: Actually, I'd love to read your story but I make it a policy not to read unpublished manuscripts. I would never consciously steal one of your ideas, you understand, but I can't guarantee that someday my subconscious

will dig up something I read in your story, and I'll use it without realizing it, and then you'll think I ripped you off. I'd never want that to happen.

Pro #1: (astonished) That's a beautiful line! Do you mind if I use it?

Pro #2: Of course not. I got it from someone else myself.

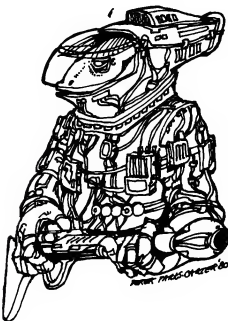
Fan #1: Anyway, it's about this barbarian swordsman who finds himself on Fire Island in 1969, and he doesn't know how he got there, and —

Pro #1: I have to go, sorry. They're showing "Tarantula" in ten minutes. I try never to miss it.

Ideas are cheap, and readers are innocent. The majority of readers are looking for story. Plot. Events and action divorced from character, setting, mood, and style.

The development of a reader follows a pattern marked by three distinct periods. In the first stage the reader is completely unsophisticated, a receptive audience for almost anything the storyteller want to do. To a young reader there is neither good writing nor bad, there is only an interesting story or a boring one. There are no critical standards, no appreciation of the subtleties of fine writing. Thanks to the vagaries of our educational system, for many this stage may last from grade school through adulthood all the way to old age. Some people never develop any sensitivity to those qualities the writer cherishes most.

The second stage occurs if the reader is subjected (not a bad choice of verbs) to an introduction to literary criticism. In this stage the reader tends to over-apply those standards he has learned, to find fault everywhere, to approach every book in a negative frame of mind, to demonstrate a kind of personal superiority by shooting down the heavy bombers of literature with the penguins of his critical faculties. This reader refuses to be impressed. Haven't we all heard someone dismiss the complete works of Ernest Hemingway or Jane Austen with five or six exhausted and cynical words? This stage is pernicious and sometimes very long-lasting. Unless the reader has an innate intelligence that is able to overcome the self-congratulatory attitude, it may last indefinitely.



The third stage happens when the reader is able to strike a balance between the totally accepting and the uniformly rejecting. The reader's skills become more mature and he becomes a partner with the writer, appreciating and demanding the best the writer can offer. The reader learns to value characterization as much as plot, mood and style as much as action. At this stage the reader is able to find value wherever it lies because good writing is good writing, in the mainstream, in sf, in a gothic novel, or on the side of a cereal box. This final stage is the most rewarding and the most promising, because it permits the reader to continue developing as long as he exercises his ability to think, to compare, and to choose. In this sense a good reader is as talented (and as rare) as a good writer.

I rushed through all that as quickly as I could, because I had a foreboding that it would be dull and preachy, and doggone if it wasn't. But I wanted to say it because it leads into the main point I really wanted to make in this column (now that I've spent two thousand words leading up to it). And when you find out what I want to go into, you're going to be upset. You're going to hate it, I know, because you've seen it in a hundred columns and heard it from a hundred panels at conventions. But hang with me, because I'm going to take a fire axe to one of sf's most cherished illusions.

I want to destroy the sense of wonder.

I want to pry loose the white-knuckled grip the sf world has taken on the sense of wonder, and perhaps indicate that the literary world is a wider, brighter place than some sf readers suspect. In meeting this fraction of our community (that is, the obsessive fans who read nothing but sf) I've always felt that they would be the kind of people who, if suddenly and miraculously transported to Oz, would find themselves apartments and jobs and start putting a little away each payday in case of emergencies. In radio and tv interviews, and newspaper and magazine columns, sf people proclaim our field as the last outpost of imagination. Yet a notable segment of our fellows suffer from a desperate lack of that quality. In the first stage of readership, they are able to enjoy any sf title at all, so long as they haven't read it already (or, at least, not recently) and the people in it shuffle their feet and shout a lot. But these readers respond to the finest works of imagination to the same degree as they do the dullest lumps of leaden hackwork.

And very often these people refuse even to try anything outside the sf field.

Why should this be so? The answer I've heard often enough is that they enjoy the sense of wonder, something they claim to find only in sf.

The only way to approach this attitude is to dissect the sense of wonder. The phrase is used all the time in the sf world, but to what does it actually refer? How much informational content, as we used to say in college, does it contain? What terms were printed words the guise and flavor of wonder?

The sense of wonder is a reaction to newness, to originality, but to a freshness that is inarguably correct. You come upon a novel idea in sf, a concept that stuns you and you wonder. That is the reaction identified by sf readers. The first time you considered parallel universes, you wondered. The first time you puzzled over time-travel paradoxes, you wondered.

The sense of wonder is obtained from whatever boggles the mind. Exactly what the mind does while boggling has always been a matter of some curiosity to me; leaving that aside, it is easy to see that boggling is not the sole province of sf. Even the

fiercest First Fandom types might be brought to that concession. Let us ask then what it is that boggles?

Extremes boggle. Extreme beauty, extreme horror, extreme passion, extreme pain.

A writer who creates a genuine person, a character who comes truly alive, who becomes a part of your experience, who stays with you for months and years after you've finished reading the book, that writer has stirred your sense of wonder.

A writer who creates a place, somewhere you've never seen except through the eyes of the imagination, a place you see in your mind whenever you think of the book, that writer has excited your sense of wonder.

A writer who arouses in you a true feeling, an emotion you have never explored, an emotion you fear or repress in yourself but are glad to experience through a fictional character, that writer has awakened your sense of wonder.

I am getting very close to what I mean, but unfortunately for you guys I'm writing this during Mardi Gras, and tonight is the Endymion parade and their Grand Marshal this year is Engelbert Humperdinck. I want to demonstrate the weakness of sf's claim to the special territory of wonder, but that will have to wait until next time. You can't cover everything at once, anyway, and I had that bowling anecdote that I couldn't get rid of anywhere else. So next time I'll talk about Graham Greene and Flannery O'Connor and some others, some of the greatest sf writers who never wrote sf. Lots more good fun for boys and girls.

Talk about sense of wonder. Mardi Gras boggles the mind.

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From the Pictured Urn



Charles Sheffield

Preamble: Here is a list of famous names. They are given for a reason which I will discuss later. Meanwhile, let me ask two questions:

- Who is the best writer on the list?
 - Who is the most successful writer on the list?
- Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur Clarke, Philip Dick, Harlan Ellison, Robert Heinlein, Ursula LeGuin, Fritz Leiber, Frank Herbert, Ann McCaffrey, Larry Niven, Fred Pohl, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, John Tolkien, Kurt Vonnegut, H.G. Wells, Jack Williamson.

PART ONE: "Another damned, thick, square book! Always scribble, scribble, scribble, eh, Mr. Gibbon?"
The following story is true. I have not even changed the names.

A friend of mine, David Bowering, was working in 1978 on a contract for the Department of Energy. One day he was presented with a huge and complex report by DOE, who asked him to provide them with an evaluation of it. Dave gave it to Rafael Fermoelle, a very sharp Cuban who had recently joined the group but who was at that time a little light on business experience. Dave asked Rafael to look over the report over the weekend and give him an opinion.

What he had in mind was straightforward. He needed something about five or six type-written pages long. It should discuss the content of the report, make suggestions as to the places where more work was needed, and perhaps go so far as to suggest that Dave's group ought to be the ones to do that work. The whole thing would be nicely packaged and returned to DOE, to reflect credit on both the original report authors and the reviewers. This sort of thing happens every day in Washington, not once but several hundred times. It's

one of the reasons why taxes are so high and yet we appear to lack all useful Government.

On Monday morning, Dave found the original report, all fat and loathsome, back on his desk. But there was no accompanying review. He was about to call Rafael, to ask if the comments were perhaps being typed, when he opened the front cover of the report. Inside was a small piece of yellow paper. On it, handwritten, was the review. It said: "This is a piece of shit."

After he got over the shock, Dave admitted that Rafael was right. To dignify that report with anything more than it received would have been criminal. It is a waste of time to draw distinctions among the warts on the face of a hag.

So what has all that to do with science fiction? Regrettably, it has a good deal to do with it -- not so much the writing of it as the reviewing of it. According to a recent issue of LOCUS (February 1980), in 1979 there were published 1,288 books of sf, of which 685 were new and 603 were reprints. Assuming that you had already read all the reprints, and had no wish to re-read any of them, you would still have to read two books a day to keep up with the new material (except for Lent, when you could cut down to one book a day and substitute the 600 pieces of original short fiction that were produced in 1979.).

Amid this flood of fiction, am I alone in wishing that I had a reliable someone to help me sort out the good stuff? I'm not saying all those books were bad (I'm not likely to say that, since two of them were mine), but not all of them were good, either. We are all drowning in material. I have given up completely the idea that I can read enough to permit me to vote,

honestly and conscientiously, for the "best sf novel of the year". As a result I tend not to vote for anything at all.

It is at this point that the book reviewers should enter and perform a sterling service. I think they should help me, should tell me what I can ignore and what I should definitely not miss.

It doesn't work like that. Why not? Because book reviewers come in four different flavors.

Flavor A is there under false pretences. It appears in a section called "Book Reviews" but it is actually literary criticism. You can easily recognize this flavor, regardless of what it calls itself, because it presumes you have already read the book. It does not bother itself with details such as plot or background, or even characters. Flavor A is an acquired taste, similar to that for anchovies or Greek olives -- pleasant in small doses, but no substitute for the real meal. I find about one column in three in F & SF is of this type. I quite like them, but they are not book reviews. Joanna Russ, for example, writes very nicely but dismisses anything that is not beautifully written, anything that is fantasy rather than sf, and anything that is not by or about women. This leaves her with a couple of books a year to recommend. And last year I did not like either of them.

Flavor B is vanilla icecream with marshmallows and maple syrup and butterscotch sauce topping. It is produced by a reviewer who never met a story he didn't like. The works reviewed range from "superb" to "fascinating" to "daringly imaginative". Last year, I sat with a Theodore Sturgeon review in one hand and the book in question in the other, looking back and forth and unable to relate the two in any way. Sturgeon is a great writer, but I think he is too kind a man to tell me what I want to know; namely, where are the stinkers? Reviewers of this kind sometimes employ an escape clause. They say, "I see no point in telling you about bad books, that's a waste of ink. Therefore I will tell you only about the books I liked." This is close to the Rafael Fernoselle technique that fits the length of the analysis to the quality of the work, but it's a cop out. Bad books should get at least one line. "This book made me want to throw up; avoid it." That would suffice.

J.C. Ballard offered a splendid variation on Flavor B in the previous issue of THRUST, thus: "When I took up reviewing for the Statesman... I would only criticize or find fault with a book if I'd read it. If I hadn't read it, I'd always give it a good review." Very fine logic.

Flavor C is fun to find but rarely encountered. Sometimes a reviewer, driven mad by constant exposure to hot, smelly prose, breaks down completely. He (or she) grabs hold of the next bad book in line and gorges it, butchers it, and shreds it between his teeth. Some unfortunate author cops the rage that should by rights have been spread over a hundred. Everyone like to read these reviews. I should say, almost everyone. It's a lot more fun if you are sitting in the stand and not the one running around the bull-ring. Flavor C is a sour pickle laced with hot pepper sauce.

Flavor D is the most elusive of all. Just as it takes a couple of thousand crocuses to produce an ounce of saffron and four or five tons of pitchblende to yield a gram of radium, so it takes five thousand words of Flavor D reviews to make a comment about a book. These reviewers have no concept of the Fernoselle Principle. Rubbish receives as much attention as masterpieces. Sad to say, Flavor D is seen most often in fan magazines, where reviewers often seem unable to distinguish a book review from a book summary.

What, then, would I regard as an ideal review? It would observe the Fernoselle Principle, giving more space to good than bad. It should offer a thumb-

nailed sketch of the plot, list the strong and weak points, and make a one-line overall evaluation. The whole thing should run one or two paragraphs. It is the K-rations of the book review business.

Is there anything else beyond Samuel Johnson's warning that may flaw the brief review I have described? There is one thing, and to rectify that difficulty I have a modest proposal. I would like to replace the standard review with an idiot's check list, thus:

Good characters? Yes/No Good action? Yes/No
Good plot? Yes/No Good background? Yes/No
Well-written? Yes/No Contributes new ideas to the field? Yes/No
This book I consider to be: hard sf/sf/fantasy/
other
define in four words
I strongly recommend/recommend/did not like/hated/
could not finish/destroyed this book.
My qualifications: I am a published writer/
writer/reader only
I am male/female/other
I read mainly hard sf/sf/fantasy/
other
define

Overall comment on the book: _____
(in eight words or less)

How useful or useable would such a check list be? Let me suggest a small exercise. Take a review from this magazine or some other. Try and complete the items on the above list, all except those about the reviewer, from the information provided by the review alone. First, was it possible to fill in all the blanks? If not, you were reading a flawed review. Second, did the above list miss any of the important points of the book review? Names of characters, and giving away central secrets of the plot, should not be considered necessary for a review.

Perhaps the list needs a couple more questions, but my central point is simple. A book review can be performed using less than a dozen binary or ternary decisions. Not a criticism, I don't want that. I want a review.

I will also argue that my idiot's check list provides in one area a good deal more than the average review. We have been given a profile, however incomplete, of the reviewer. I know of no review column that offers this, though occasionally a reviewer provides some comment on personal tastes. A picture of a reviewer can be built up from the reviews themselves, using the books reviewed as the template against which the written comments are measured. But this is slow, it requires that you learn the tastes of the reviewer over months and years -- and you have to read the books themselves to build up a data base, which defeats the whole object of the exercise.

My worry about the tastes of the reviewer arise only because there is so much disagreement about what sf ought to be. Is it a debased form of general fiction, or is it the lead edge of general fiction? Higher than the apes, or lower than the angels? I was much perplexed by one review of my first book, which said it was "merely science fiction." That's what I thought I had been trying to write.

The discussion about what sf should and should not be is not a recently discovered issue. Look at this:

"What science fiction chiefly needs, I should say, is a rigorous raising of literary standards, an insistence on good English as opposed to the jargon of magazine hackwriting. Form and finish are all too often lacking in stories that are otherwise excellent."

"As to gaining the recognition of the 'highbrows' -- well, I hope that science fiction will never gain it, if the winning of this guerdon must involve an

emulation of the squalors and tediousities, the high-brow pornography and general garbage-mongering of the current school of realistic novelists."

Now, we can deduce a good deal from those two paragraphs. The writer occupies the middle ground, where he is distressed by 'idea' stories that are badly written, and impatient with those who would make sf no more than a mimic of mainstream and so give it respectability! I don't think we would be too surprised to find those two paragraphs in an article in this magazine, or in a letter column -- that of WONDER STORIES for August, 1932, which I was reading last week for certain odd reasons of my own. The writer was Clark Ashton Smith, well-known at the time for his stories. I think that if I could meet him today, we might find much in common. The same issues occupy the field. Plus ca change...

(That last phrase breaks one of my home-made rules of writing fiction. More on that later.)

PART TWO: "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."

I begin to feel like Tristram Shandy, who set out to write his autobiography but never got past the day of his birth. Let me jump to the real issue of this column.

A good book review tells a reader all that he or she wishes to know about a book before reading (or not reading) it. But writers would like to know more. There is one key point about a book that matters to writers and not to readers: How successful is it? How well will it sell, how much money will it make?

Let's define terms. If you looked at my two questions of the Preamble and said to yourself, "What idiotic questions! He hasn't told us what he means by 'best' and by 'successful,'" then you have answered exactly right and receive two hundred bonus points.

Does 'best' mean most praised in literary circles, most original and versatile in style, most honored by literary awards, most esteemed by sf fandom, or most famous fifty years from now? How about 'successful'? Does that mean the writer who has the most books in print, the most books published, most translations, most works on the best-seller lists, most copies sold on a per book basis, or perhaps the writer who has made the most money from his science fiction?

'Best' and 'successful' mean all of these, and a lot more.

Why do we care? What difference does it make if Tolkien has more degrees than LeGuin, or if Dick is more translated than Leiber, or if "The Note In God's Eye" outsells "Foundation"?

To the reader, little or no difference. To a writer trying to make a living from writing sf, these things matter. Even writers who think of their sales as subordinate to their art would like their books to sell well ("No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money"). These "most successful" labels then take on great significance. The nice thing about the list that I gave at the beginning is that every writer on it is the "most successful" by some criterion. The budding writer can deduce very little by trying to analyze my list.

Suppose we become more simple-minded. Let's not deal with intangibles such as 'success', let's ask this question: Can we take the list I gave and put them into some kind of commercial order?

Even this is difficult. There are widely different numbers of works in print, and a new author is perhaps most interested in figures on a per-book basis. Some people write both fiction and non-fiction, some use many pen names. Then there are film options, and tv series, and royalty rates, and ghosting, and agents' fees, and foreign sales, and the sometimes curious practices employed by certain publishing houses

when it comes to computing the number of copies eligible for royalty payments.

Let's simplify some more. Book income only, North American sales only. That will probably be what the struggling beginner cares about most, at least to start with. Can we get a handle on such income levels?

I'm not suggesting, by the way, that a new writer should model himself or herself on a particular someone for reasons of money alone. For one thing, would a person who only wanted money be writing science fiction? The huge advances come elsewhere. (But sf stays in print for twenty or thirty years, sometimes, and that's rarely true of other books. More on that, too, a bit later in this column.)

The success of certain authors and certain types of books is not the only factor influencing a new writer, but that success ought to be one factor. Assuming that a new writer's first priority is to achieve publication, it is unwise to try to break into a field of writing that is shrinking or already crowded. For the past couple of years, sf has been a very good market for new writers. That may not last, and today's successes may be gone tomorrow, but we all need role models.

So.

Who sells best, in this country, in science fiction?

Now I feel like the man who, in his zeal to sell the Brooklyn Bridge, has included a delivery clause in the contract. The information I need to answer my own question is unavailable.

There are several possible sources for it, and it's instructive to look at each of them.

From the authors. It won't work. Authors seldom talk about their sales figures in numbers, and when they do, it's often to inflate them. That's good for both ego and business, since other publishers may be lured in by a hint of big prior sales.

How inaccurate is information that comes from the authors? Variable, like most things in life. In one case (perhaps extreme) an author claimed in print that his last novel had sold very fast, up to a quarter of a million copies in the first year. His royalty statement, after two years, showed sales of less than sixty thousand.

From the agents. Not directly, since they have the same motivation as the authors. Indirectly, perhaps by the authors that agents drop -- but that won't happen to any of our 'successful' authors, and information on unsuccessful ones is not much use.

From the IRS. No way. First, it's protected by privacy



statutes; second it will reflect all the income, from T-shirt and foreign rights and all the rest, that comes to a writer. Anyway, the smarter writers will have found ways to minimize their taxable income.

From the publishers. You can get lots of publicity from publishers, and remarkably little on the actual sales. One guideline is to look at the number of printings that have been made of a book. It's an imperfect guide, because you usually have no way of knowing the size of the print run each time. It's still one of the few hard pieces of information you can get.

Author's publicity. Can you tell anything about success from the number of times that an author appears on talk shows or in interviews? No. Some authors relish privacy, others like to live in the public gaze. How many interviews with Heinlein have you seen recently? From the size of advances. Advances make the news only when they are very big. Norman Spinrad, in a recent issue of LOCUS, roused a good deal of reaction from readers when he suggested that no one should take less than \$10,000 as an advance for even a first novel. People who wrote in to correct this may have missed the point. Myself, I regard it as a very clever Spinrad technique to reduce the number of new authors entering an adequately populated field. Anyway, you can tell something from those big advances, at least in the case of authors with a long history with a particular publisher, because they expect to recover the advance at a very minimum. When a publisher pays a big advance to someone who has previously published elsewhere, or has published little or anything, then you have a more difficult situation. Maybe the publisher knows something we don't know; maybe they have rocks where their brains should be.

The book shops. My final source is the most mundane. If you want to know what sf sells in North America, go to the book stores and the book departments of the drug stores, and see who is there. Make notes as to how long they stay there, too -- some department stores keep books on the shelves for only a month or two.

Like everything else, this too has problems. The distribution system for books seems to have been developed in Mesopotamia, well before cuneiform was perfected. Books pop up in odd places, fall to appear in others. There is a random number generator somewhere in the system. Despite these oddities, I think the book stores are a better source of real data than anything else.

So how should the list at the beginning be ranked? Go, budding writer, and start counting. How many Niven's in your local book store, how many Heinlein's? And what about Stephen King, and Stephen Donaldson? Where were they on my list? (Answer: I forgot to put them in -- it was a top-of-the-head list, and getting it to alphabetical order was too much for me. There are other notable omissions from it.)

Count books for a month or two and compile your own list. And when you have finished, send me a copy, because I have no idea how the ordering will work out.

PART THREE: "The golden rule is that there are no golden rules."

Now, very quickly, for a few rules of writing. They may be obvious to everyone, but over the past couple of years they have come to me as surprises. Everybody who writes for a while develops their own ideas of do's and don'ts, starting out from Heinlein's rules which I will not repeat here. (Where did they originally appear? Would some educated reader enlighten me as to their original publication?)

Here are some of mine:

1. If you are writing in English, write in English. When readers don't understand a foreign phrase, they are annoyed. When they do, you might have well have

written in English in the first place. If you want to demonstrate your erudition, go and write a text book. Showing-off in fiction distracts the reader.

2. Write about things in the order in which they happen. Most of us live forwards. If you do use a flashback, signal it clearly enough that the reader will have no doubt that it has happened, who it happened to, and how it fits into the narrative. Chronological complexity for literary effect alone is a pain.

3. Limit yourself to one ten-dollar word per hundred thousand. There are simple alternatives to "entelechy," to "apodictic," and to "aerysticivorous." You will again annoy many readers and do nothing for the well-educated. (I used the word "unbonated" in my first novel in 1978, but I like to think I would not do it today.)

4. Don't write perched on the outer limit of your scientific knowledge. If you have done four years of college biochemistry, keep your writing within the first three of those. There is nothing worse than reading someone who is teetering along on the brink of their own ignorance. ("So why," they said to me, "do you offer comments on writing, when you know nothing at all about the formal rules of writing?" "Shut up," I explained.)

5. Remember that fiction and non-fiction are different. This is a rule for people like me, who spend most of their time writing technical material that is (we hope) non-fiction. In the latter, clarity is more important than anything else. When in doubt, it is generally better to repeat something rather than saying too little for full communications. In fiction, what you leave out tells a lot of the story. As Voltaire said, "Le secret d'ennuyer...de tout dire." See what I meant in my first rule? As Voltaire said, "The way to be boring is to say everything." It's better to say it in English, even though we are now only paraphrasing what he really said.

6. Know the ending before you begin and the middle will usually take care of itself.

7. Preserve a mental image of your reader. There is nothing wrong with writing a juvenile, so long as you know it all the way.

8. At the beginning of your career, it is more important to be improving than it is to be famous.

9. Don't aim to shock and horrify for its own sake. I only put this in because it's so frequently ignored. (Horace: "Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet" -- or, as a writer should say, "Do not let Medea slay her boys before the audience.")

10. Write something every day. I put this one in because although I never observe it, I feel it is a good idea. Fred Pohl's rule ("Four pages a day") may be impossible for people who are not full-time writers, but a tiny bit every day ought to be possible for anyone. (Pliny: "Nulla dies sine linea" -- "Never a day without doing a line", and I presume I have by now made my point.)

11. Keep writing. If you want your books to sell, they must stay in print and in the stores. The best way to assure that is to produce new work regularly. There is also a snowball effect, which means that each work you have in print sticks to all the others and pulls in both publicity and money.

12. Keep it short. Readers are patient, and sf readers more patient than most. But if you blout a book to two hundred thousand words, and it should be seventy thousand, the readers will get to the point where they echo the tom cat who has been making passionate love to the skunk for a couple of hours: "Well, I guess I've enjoyed about as much of this as I can stand."

That seems like a good place to end the column.

SF ART



dan steffan

Where does a child of the fifties go to live out the fantasies of his youth? Fantasies filled with childhood memories of fairy tales and unexplained dreams; fantasies sharpened in adolescence by the media explosion; fantasies that somehow must be communicated to the children around you in your adulthood? He goes to the sources of his childhood fascinations: films, fiction, music and art. If you happen to be artistically inclined, grew up in the fifties, and wanted to live out your childhood dreams, you might consider going into comic books. Comics are like cheap movies...they offer continuity, plot (if you're lucky) and visual hooks...and they are accessible to anyone who wants to slap down his 50¢. Comics can offer a young cartoonist/illustrator the chance to broaden his horizons.

But Comics are also a dead end.

It has become apparent to me that if you are really talented and have any aspirations toward life-long artistic growth, you will run through comics quite quickly. The restrictions and bull-headed ideas of "the company" never allow artists to grow and show real merit—because merit breaks the formula. And more than anything else, comics are formula. There are many examples of this in the last ten or twelve years, artists who were not allowed to push their artistic borders inside of their beloved artform; artists who were screwed over by "the company" at the point when they could have transcended the artform and have made it into something better. The list reads like a who's who, and at the top of the list should be these four names: Berni Wrightson, Mike Kaluta, Barry Smith and Jeff Jones.

Pushed out of the comics field by narrow-minded publishers and the limitations of the form (poor printing, etc.), these four men decided to forge ahead and expand their horizons.

The Studio, published in this country by Big O Books, offers a glimpse of what they have found in their quests to discover the heart and soul of illustrative art. Produced in the format of the original *Dragon's Dream* (Big O's British counterpart) book, Roger Dean's *Views*, The Studio offers a look at the phenomenon of the comic book artist growing into the fine artist. They call themselves New Romanticists, or Twentieth-Century Pre-Raphaelites. They are trying to capture the textures of childhood fantasies on a level that is ultimately more honest than the ones they used in comic books. These four men are trying to put the human spirit back into painting. They are attempting to return the dazzle and the mist to the paintings they create, like the soft focus of a dream, and the crystal clarity of a nightmare.

But the transition from comics to fine art has not been an easy one for the members of The Studio. In some cases, it has meant only the addition of pretentiousness to the works; at other times it shows the tightening and refining that comics could never have offered.

The easiest part of dissecting this book is the splitting of it into four parts—each artist is given roughly equal space for the exhibition of his works. The color reproduction is excellent, as is the design. Many detailed blow-ups are offered for the study of individual pieces. The art is accompanied by text about the artists and their thoughts on the paintings, which, although written in a somewhat self-righteous manner, offer interesting vignettes about childhood experiences and dreams which each artist has translated into his works.

The book starts with Jeff Jones, which I will leave for last, as his appearance is somewhat of an enigma compared to the other three.

I have followed Michael William Kaluta's work since the late sixties, and his appearances in fanzines like *Squa Tront*. What was once a sketchy, unaccomplished style (owing a great deal to Al Williamson and Frank Frazetta) has changed over the years into a tightly woven sequence of lines, like a spider's web. Kaluta's work in comics was undisputed prior to his work on D.C.'s *The Shadow*. With that book, it became apparent that Kaluta was not an artist struggling to bring his meager skills up to acceptability, but was an artist struggling to hold his ideas down to the level of the comic medium. Since leaving the comics field, Kaluta has been able to "let go"; he has enlarged his works and jumped into the realm of full color with an obvious delight that doesn't seem to be present in the work of the other artists in this book. According to his medium, he works towards different goals. His oil paintings often have a somber quality which evoked thoughts of artists like Arthur Rackham or a painterly Graham Ingles. Rich in ambers and Umbers, his oils remind me of old brown photographs of unknown places (perhaps taken by Lovecraft's Richard Upton Pickman)—slightly out of focus and filled with emotion.

On the other side of the Kaluta coin are his paintings done in watercolors and dyes. These are bright and colorful, displaying a love for dense colors reminding me of that genius of the *Art Nouveau* movement of the late 1800's, Alphonse Mucha. Take a look at "The Sentry" on page 69. It is an astonishingly beautiful and humorous painting, crafted with wit and personality that might have been missing from a lesser talent. A look at "Liamon Cranston and Margo Lane" on page 73 may give some idea of where Kaluta's *Shadow* comic might have gone if he had been given the chance. There isn't a disappointing painting by Kaluta in the book. His work shows an uncompromising

understanding and use of spontaneity. Michael Kaluta is easily the most dazzling contributor to The Studio.

Barry Windsor-Smith's portion of the book offers a look at another direction in which a comic book artist can go. Smith's work is "slick". He has polished and refined his stylistic ideas since leaving the comics, and at the same time pushed himself into a corner. Unlike his bookmates, Smith has chosen style and form over content, leaving his works with a cold, unemotional gloss. When Smith was working out the beginnings of his style in Marvel's "Conan, The Barbarian" he looked dramatic and refreshing—he had been able to break out of the Jack Kirby mold and exhibit an illustrative finesse that overshadowed most of his contemporaries. Smith became a star, and it seems to have gone to his head.

The dynamic in his earlier work has been replaced by stiffness; everything seems posed, as though he has been studying marble statuary. This in itself is not such a bad thing, but combined with an overwhelming pretentiousness, the product is art which just doesn't ring true.

I suppose that Smith figured that in order to break away from comics and the constraints that go with them, he had to prove that his art was never really comic book stuff to begin with. What were once the refreshing stylistic trademarks of his excellent comic work have become the very things that are holding him back. Despite the classic quality of works like "Morgana" and "Christmas", Smith seems unable to translate his ideas into a single artistic whole. The earlier works, like "The Ram and the Peacock" and "Something Is Awaits", are still very close to the style he was using on Conan. But later illustrations lose the cohesive style that is displayed in those works. The black and white drawings of Sir Lancelot and Jane Morris could easily have been lifted from some old English book—they offer no glimpse of Smith's personality. "Sarah Bernhard" is a pencil drawing that could easily pass for one of Mucha's preliminary sketches.

What's the point? Good art is, among other things, personality. Barry Windsor-Smith's current art is an experiment in technicalities and technique, and it is bothersome. And disappointing. Smith is capable of much more. Unlike his friends in The Studio, Smith has momentarily lost the spark of originality that once made his work so interesting.

In a desperate attempt to fit into this Pre-Raphaelite style style, he has set himself above his audience. Where Kaluta, Jones and Wrightson have made a natural evolution from their comic book roots, Smith has put up barriers constructed by self-indulgent artistic style that prevents people from just stepping into the paintings and enjoying themselves.

They often say that certain artists or writers have been born after their time, that they belonged in the world of a hundred years before. Barry Windsor-Smith is not one of those artists...he just thinks he is.

Berni Wrightson closes out the book with a collection of pieces which will surely delight the reader, offering a chance to sit back and relax. I have always felt that a good illustration or painting should be one that the viewer can "step into" and get lost in. It should offer the viewer the opportunity to enter the private mind of the individual artist.

Wrightson, like Kaluta, has not changed his ideas and goals away from those he held as a comic artist. He offers us, in this book, a catalogue of his accomplishments since leaving the comics field. Always displaying a knack for putting character and personality into his work, Wrightson is now focusing in on those aspects. No longer having to supplement his

drawings with the incidental characters and devices to propel limping plotlines, he is producing marvelous scenarios that show off his expertise.

Wrightson has always been concerned with the stylistic questions raised by the comic artform, and he is now working out the answers. The moods and emotions he is capable of evoking in his paintings are admirable. His ability with a pen and brush is often staggering. And it is this, his ability with moods, more than anything else, that sets him apart from Smith. Berni Wrightson's work has depth in all senses of the word. Stylistic expertise, coupled with emotional content, wit and intelligence, make him the top in his field.

In "Momentos," originally produced for a gallery show several years ago, Wrightson has packed his painting with everything that is good about his work. It is finely rendered and subtly colored. It shows us character and humor in the faces of the decapitated heads, and just a touch of nightmarishness, making him heir to Craham Ingles' throne. Though he handles color well, he doesn't appear to have a firm grip yet on the techniques required for oil painting. His portfolio of paintings based on the works of Edgar Allen Poe (pages 128-131) are cruder than any of his other works. He would appear to lack the control that he displays in his black and white work. His black and white illustrations, however, show him to be a master of linework. His control of textures and mood is astonishing. Featuring pages from his masterwork, an illustrated edition of *Frankenstein*, Wrightson shows that he has few peers. I can't recommend these works to you enough; they are staggering. He has been working on this project for several years and expects that it will be another several years before it is complete; but when it is, it will be an essential volume in the library of anyone with an interest in illustration. The rest of Wrightson's pieces in this book are equally excellent. The humor and childlike fantasies included in this book are most satisfying.

A good many of the color illustrations in this book by Wrightson (and the others for that matter) have been printed as posters. If you like what you see here, I'm sure you can find prints of some of them in your local comics store.

Before I move on to Jeff Jones, I'd like to mention one more piece by Berni Wrightson "Loggerhead" on page 153. This illustration is so good, it makes me want to retire my pens and brushes and join the plumber's union. It offers everything that is good in Wrightson's work. The subtle coloring and the downright funniness of it all makes this piece worth the price of the book.



all by itself. Check this one out first.

And now on to the part you all have been waiting for: Jeff Jones. Jones is a major talent in the world of illustration, extraordinarily talented, and the closest thing the Studio has to a fine artist. I've been a fan of Jones' work since the late Sixties when he first started appearing in fanzines like ERBdom, The Burroughs Bibliophiles and Tom Reamy's Trumpet. Though his first work pro works appeared in Creepy and Eerie; (he also did a Flash Gordon story for comics and an occasional strip for D.C.'s War books), he was never involved in the comics field to the degree of the others. Primarily, Jeff Jones is a painter.

It is this background that sets him apart from Kaluta, Smith and Wrightson. It is obvious to any one who has followed his work from the pseudo-Frazetta paintings of the sixties and early seventies to the impressionistic wraparounds he did for Zebra Books that he has a wide range of expressions at his beck and call. He has been painting long enough to break through all of the bullshit connected with the novice. Jones understands paint and how to move it and use it. He is also in control of his images, knowing what not to paint, as well as what to paint.

Having long ago passed out of his Frazetta phase, Jeff Jones has moved into the realm of the classic painter. Paintings like his huge "Blind Narcissus" on page 47, offers us proof of this. Displaying the influences of James McNeil Whistler and J.M.W. Turner, Jones shows us everything that is lacking in the paintings of his Studio associates. I can't express to you the quality of Jones' painting. They are vibrant and colorful; filled with the spirit of painters like Van Gogh and Monet; and they exhibit the disciplines and intellect of someone who

is becoming a master of his craft. "Judith" on page 33 is a striking portrait in the style of Whistler and the Pre-Raphaelites of his day. The scope and range of this man's talent and ability is overwhelming. Complex works like "In a Sheltered Corner" on page 35 prove that he knows how to render in a form comparable to Wrightson's, while preferring a subtler approach, one that is full of human emotions.

Jeffrey Jones is an artist of great worth. His patience, style, intelligence and his outstanding sensuality is rivaled by no one in this book. Every time we are offered an opportunity to dive into the heart of a Jones painting, we are amply rewarded. Jeff Jones is superb.

#

Overall, The Studio is an exciting couple of hours. There is so much to be gotten from the artists in the book; they all (including Smith) show a love and dedication to furthering their craft. Though they take individual paths, they all fight for the same thing: Expertise; and for the most part they have found it.

My one visit to the studio itself will always be memorable (it has broken up since this book came out). It was a fantasy land for enlightened people. My first reaction was that this (their studio loft) was something for an artist, like myself, to work towards. It was a symbol of the freedom that can be obtained by artists with a great deal of talent, and the good sense to allow it to grow and prosper. This fine book is proof of this. The Studio, published by Big O Books, should be in the hearts and mind of anyone with a love for great illustrative art. It should also be on their bookshelves. BUY THIS BOOK!!

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This Column rarely generates much feedback in the form of direct letter to me, but Benje Wannover (who did not include his address either with his letter or on his envelope -- aha, there, Benje!) did write directly to me at HEAVY METAL with the following missive:

"Dear Ted,

"Re the latest issue of THRUST:

"I agree that Steve Brown is an excellent choice for HM, and I particularly appreciated your decision not to reveal why. (You and I both know that Brown doesn't have a brain in his head, which is a fortuitous circumstance giving him almost ideal rapport with HM's fans.)

"What I don't agree with is the outlandish suit, vest, tie and haircut you showed up with at the Fantasy WorldCon. The TW personality is inextricably tied to the TW common man image, i.e. dungarees and T shirt. (When your outfit went Madison Ave., your personality went with it.)

"Yours for the old TW (who was something of an antihero.)

"Benje Wannover"

Benje didn't sign his name by hand; the entire letter is neatly typed.

In fact, I entertain grave doubts about Benje being the real name of the author of that letter.

The libel of Steve Brown is something I don't feel I should dignify with any reply, but I am Cut To The Quick by Benje's comments on my sartorial appearance in Providence last October.

Benje -- or whomever you may be -- your eyesight is definitely no better than your other perceptions. The last time I wore a tie was to my father's funeral, several years ago. I can't recall if I wore a vest on that occasion, but if I did it was the last time I wore one of those, as well. As for my hair, periodically I twist it into a ponytail, when it's long enough for that, and lop the ponytail off with a pair of scissors. I did that in July. I'll probably do it again next July, whether it needs it or not.

So much for my 'Madison Avenue outfit.'

In the March, 1980, issue of HM I published a letter from Denny Daley of Chicago. Daley was -- and perhaps still is -- a letterhack to AMAZING, and at the close of his letter he asked, "By the way, have you checked out your old magazines lately?"

As a matter of fact, I have. It's not easy. Neither AMAZING nor FANTASTIC appear on any of the New York City stands I've checked. One drug store in Falls Church still carries AMAZING, but hasn't had FANTASTIC since the fall of 1970. That drug store currently has copies of both the February and May (1980) issues of AMAZING. I bought one of each; I don't think anyone else has.

After a pretty disappointing start under its new ownership and editorship, both magazines appear to be improving -- at least in their packaging. AMAZING is back to all new fiction (FANTASTIC appears to have settled on one or two reprints an issue), and the general quality of the art in the last couple of issues is on the upswing. A brief sampling of the fiction in the May AMAZING assures me that most of it is still slushpile stuff that I would have rejected (in one story a character says "Ark, ark," every time he coughs: moments of unintentional hilarity), but I like the use of the little bio-sketches after each story, and I approve of the use of fan-feature material. There's a lot of enthusiasm being put into the magazine by its current contributors, and that

MY COLUMN TED WHITE

makes up for a lot.

Unfortunately it may not be enough.

The May AMAZING also contains the annual Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation required by the Postal Service of all magazines which have 2nd Class mailing privileges. It makes for rather grim reading.

Although AMAZING still prints 66,000 copies of each issue, sales continue to fall. The average sales of the four issues published in the year in question (which, with a filing date of October 1, 1979, must include "my" final issue, the February, 1979 AMAZING) are only 22,332 copies, 20,935 sold on the newsstands. That average includes sales of the issue published nearest to the filing date, which are significantly lower: 17,560, of which 16,564 copies were sold on the newsstands. (The implication is that earlier issues sold several thousand copies better than the average: sales are falling.)

Of course these figures reflect primarily on the first two or three issues of AMAZING under its new regime, which were in most respects poorer than the more recent issues.

But, newsstand sales of 16,564! That's roughly ten thousand copies less than we were selling when I was editor -- and sales then were nothing to brag about. Ultimate lost \$15,000.00 in 1977. The losses must have been significantly higher in 1978 and 1979.

Can a magazine be turned around when its sales sink that low? I'm sure that's an important question for Arthur Bernhard.

Although several people have assured me that Omar Cohagen, listed on the masthead as Editor, is indeed a real person, the Statement lists Elinor Mavor as Editor. Whether this is a fiction or the masthead is, clearly the editor has a serious challenge ahead of him or her. (The Statement includes this clause: "I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete," which is signed by Arthur Bernhard, so I tend to believe the Statement rather than the masthead, although I'm aware of some fraudulent Statements published in the past by others...)

The basic problem with AMAZING, as I see it, is that Bernhard is more concerned with certain superficialities than he is with the magazine's core problems. One such superficiality is reflected in the letters. These are uniformly favorable in their comments (and if any reference is made to my editorship, it is always negative), and are rarely worth reading. When a letter column includes personal replies to direct correspondence, you know that they're scraping the bottom of the barrel. (One such letter is from a collector who is unwilling to sell his copy of issue #1 -- in return for a lifetime sub for him and one heir; smart fellow; he probably realizes what a bad bargain that's likely to be -- to replace the publisher's copy "lost to fire from our archives." One wonders which fire that was...)

Another such superficiality is summed up in this assessment of *The Black Hole*: "a film that promises to rival the best of the latest science fiction blockbusters." One expects to see the term "sci-fi" lauded in AMAZING's pages next.

Bernhard wants to cash in on the popularity of sci-fi movies like *Star Wars*, et al. (He was very unhappy with my criticisms of that movie.) He also wants to cash in on the nostalgia for sf's "good old days," as witnessed by his revival of the old logo (or a variation thereon).

What he does not want to do is to spend any money, especially on good science fiction. His priorities are evident from a glance at AMAZING's cover: there is a lot of type, but no story titles

or author's names. Instead we get "First in Science Fiction Since 1926" and "Founded by HUGO GERNSBACH," along with "ALL New Stories," and a listing of Darrell Schweitzer's interview with Wilson Tucker (Darrell's interview was not only two years old, it avoided any mention of Tucker's post-1950's books, for some curious reason), plus "9 Book Reviews," "6 Department Features," and "15 Original Illustrations," followed by a list of illustrations of whom the only name of distinction is Fabian's.

In the past few months GALAXY has been sold to GALILEO, ANALOG has been sold to Davis (ASIMOV's), and of the long-term of magazines only PFSF has remained stable. GALAXY is changing its format to GALILEO's size. It's too early yet to tell what Davis will do with ANALOG (their first issue will be covered September, 1980), but if ASIMOV's is any example we can expect a much cruder job of packaging and much poorer graphics. These are times of change. The traditional digest size is going down the tube.

I've been pushing for the larger format (currently used only by GALILEO, which despite Dell distribution has not been visible on New York City newsstands) for almost ten years, now. It's more visible on the stands, offers much more attractive packaging possibilities, and looks like the wave of the future.

But the format of a magazine means nothing if it isn't well distributed and never reaches the retail stands. From time to time I've complained about the incredibly bad distribution of magazines get, and from time to time someone has come along and claimed that I was just looking for a scapegoat to blame for my own deficiencies as an editor.

Perhaps now that I'm editing a magazine with good distribution (more or less) and healthy sales, I can discuss the subject without the complaint of sour grapes.

Basically, your garden-variety science fiction magazine has been caught in a down-spinning spiral of decreasing sales and circulation for more than twenty years. It says something for the tenacity of both the publishers and readers of sf that the magazines have held on for as long as they have.

(Sales of sf magazines have always been precarious. I recall some years ago reading that Ray Palmer's *OTHER WORLDS* -- a magazine of which I was very fond in the early fifties -- sold an average of around 18,000 copies.)

The basic problem is that sf magazines are regarded by distributors as low-volume, low-profit items. No sf magazine has sold over 100,000 copies on American newsstands in recent memory. The majority (GALAXY, PFSF, AMAZING, FANTASTIC) have sold around or less than 30,000 copies on the newsstands, nation-wide. (Forget the subscription sales; they're irrelevant.) Spread over the country's retail outlets, that means very few copies are placed on the actual stands, and many stands won't receive any.

In the Washington, D.C. area, the "draw" (the number of copies accepted by that area's wholesaler, District News) for AMAZING in 1969 was 1,000 copies per issue. I suspect that GALAXY, et al, had a similar draw. (PFSF was not accepted by District News, and had no distribution in the Nation's Capital from 1958 -- when American News ceased acting as a magazine distributor -- until 1974.) ANALOG's must have been higher, since alone among of magazines ANALOG made the supermarkets, although not at the checkout displays. District News "requested" a "handling charge" of 5¢ a copy, and was refused by AMAZING's national distributor, ICD (Hearst), who knew extortion when they saw it. District News promptly cut AMAZING's draw to 500 copies.

By contrast, District News sells around 100,000 copies of each issue of *PLAYBOY* in the DC area.

AMAZING was then selling for 60¢ a copy. PLAYBOY's cover price was then \$1.50. The local distributor takes a percentage of the cover price -- as does the retailer -- on each copy sold. It does not require higher math to see that even if all 500 copies of an issue of AMAZING were sold, District News' take from that sale would be insignificant in comparison with their take from the sale of an issue of PLAYBOY.

From the wholesaler's point of view, AMAZING is just a minor annoyance; all the profits are to be had from PLAYBOY.

PLAYBOY is a winner on two counts. First, since its cover price is higher, the wholesaler makes more on each copy sold. Second, it sells vastly better.

There is little likelihood of any genuine sf magazine selling in PLAYBOY's league. Even OMNI, which is not a genuine sf magazine, doesn't come close -- although it is ahead of the "real" sf magazines by a vast margin.

However, sf magazines could be priced as high as PLAYBOY. Or even higher. If this was combined with a quality package -- and contents which justified the price to the readers -- such a magazine might find a lot more acceptance among wholesaler. Wholesalers are realistic enough not to expect all the magazines they carry to sell in PLAYBOY's league (although in their fondest dreams, that is exactly what they want). If they make a decent amount on each copy sold, and they sell enough different magazines, the net result is the same for them.

Wholesalers are the basic bottleneck in the distribution of sf magazines.

Because their expectation for sf magazines are low, they treat the magazines badly, thus fulfilling their expectations with continued marginal sales. In many cases they never distribute large number of the magazines they receive. Cartons of magazines may be returned unopened. Worse, the covers may be returned (for credit), while the coverless copies are bootlegged for sale in shops specializing in coverless magazines at below-cover prices. (Wholesalers stopped shipping back complete copies of unsold magazines years ago when shipping costs began to go up. It's a lot cheaper to ship back just the covers. But what to do with the rest of those unsold copies? They're supposed to be pulped. In some cases they might actually be. But in some cities -- Philadelphia is a famous example -- coverless copies of new magazines are on sale in the bootleg outlets before the same issue has hit the legitimate stand. These aren't "returns" -- unsold copies. These are brand new copies being diverted from the normal distribution chain.) The wholesaler is the culprit. He returns the covers for full credit (magazines are sold, essentially, on consignment; the wholesaler as well as the retailer pays only for those copies sold), and then turns around and sells the coverless copies (for which he paid nothing at all) to the bootlegger. This represents pure profit, probably in cash and unaccounted for (and thus non-taxable). It can easily turn out that the wholesaler makes more money on the unsold copies of the magazines than he could if he'd properly distributed and sold those same copies. Some readers think it's "smart" to buy the coverless copies since they save money that way. But the publisher loses. He sees not a penny from the sale of those coverless copies, and he is in effect subsidizing the whole operation out of his pocket, having already paid for their printing and shipping.

A few years ago the FTC slapped ARA (parent company of District News and more than a half dozen other major urban wholesalers around the country) for trying its extortionate tricks on the New York Times and Daily News (both of which are distributed more or less nationally). The game was the same one they'd

pulled on AMAZING (and, it goes without saying FANTASTIC as well); the difference was that the publishers of the Times and Daily News were big enough to make a fuss about it. But old dogs resist learning new tricks -- and regional wholesalers often operate like branch offices of the Mafia. (Newsstands in DC which accepted distribution from sources other than District News stopped being serviced by District News. This effectively forced them to deal with District News and only District News. One local DC magazine was forced out of business when District News stopped distributing it and refused to allow "its" stands to accept the magazine from anyone else. Very few stands were willing to oppose District News, since all the money-makers -- and there's PLAYBOY again -- came from District News.)

SF magazines play a very minor role in all this. They are simply caught up in the gears of the machinery of distribution as it is practiced in this country.

A few years ago I calculated that the average sf magazine sold approximately one-third to one-quarter of those copies it shipped out through its national distributor. A sampling of royalty statements from the paperback publishers of sf indicated to me that most non-best-selling sf paperbacks are in the same boat. A book which is published in an edition of 60,000 to 75,000 copies can expect sales, all other things being equal, of 20,000 to 25,000 copies. (Editors from several of the bigger publishers have assured me that their sales are much higher, that they sell 40% to 70% of the copies printed of their sf books. The bigger publishers have better distribution, often dealing directly with bookstores, and significantly longer "shelf-life" for their books -- the typical shelf-life for an sf paperback in two days -- but in some cases I suspect those editors of either ignorance or duplicity, since I've seen contradictory royalty statements from their companies...)

Why should a magazine publisher have to publish 60,000 copies of an issue from which he can expect



sales of 20,000 to 25,000? Why must be invest in so much sheer waste?

The answer, again, lies with the wholesaler. It seems almost certain that between one-third and half of all those copies shipped to the wholesalers are never placed on retail display. In some cases those never-displayed copies are diverted to the bootleggers, mentioned earlier, but I seriously doubt that most of them are. So what happens to them? Why aren't they put on display?

It goes back to expectation. SF magazines are marginal sellers from the wholesaler's point of view. He knows this because it's "always" been that way. So why go through the process of unpacking them and distributing them when it will be futile? If a given newsstand routinely gets five copies of AMAZING and routinely returns two or three unsold copies, why give them ten or twenty copies? The wholesaler, never noted for sharp wit or high intelligence, settles into a rarely varying routine. If a stand got X copies of AMAZING last time, it will get the same number this time. Even if the stand requests more copies, it will still get the same number. (As editor of AMAZING I used to get letters from people who ran their own newsstand or worked for stores with newsstands, detailing typical horror stories of this nature. "I could sell twice as many copies if I could get them," was a typical complaint, "but they won't ship me any more. Can I order copies direct from your publisher?" I usually passed such letters on to the publisher and for a while he tried setting up direct accounts with a few stores. This is a tricky business, since the national distributor and area wholesalers must agree to it first. The danger, from the point of view of wholesaler and national distributor, is that copies they never distributed in the first place will be given to them as "returns," and they'll give unearned credit for these "returns." But even when they agreed, the way was less than clear to better sales. To be sure, some stores were routinely ordering and selling from 50 to 100 copies of an issue of AMAZING and FANTASTIC, but they seemed curiously reluctant to pay their bills. When billing and followups became more of a hassle than he considered to be worth it, the publisher closed most of the direct accounts.)

Because he "knows" SF magazines are marginal items, the wholesaler gives them scant attention, thus creating a self-fulfilling situation in which SF magazines remain marginal to his business and rate little if any positive attention. It is well-known in the field that if an SF magazine could afford a "road crew" of salesmen to go through each area, pep up distribution and check to insure good display, SF magazines — virtually any of them — could sell several hundred percent better. But that costs money. Much more money than most SF magazine publishers have, or want to spend. In the end it's the vicious spiral of downward expectations, lower sales, and consequently lower budgets and vanishing income, that spells the doom of the traditional SF magazine.

AMAZING is typical. Under Sol Cohen few if any changes were made in its packaging. Cohen was basically conservative as a publisher — he was willing to do no more than he had already done. More of the same was his policy. (Although over the years I tried to get him to see that this was not enough, his usual response to a suggestion of mine was, "I'm scared of it, Sol.")

Arthur Bernhard is less conservative. His packaging ideas are, if nothing else, more lively and more colorful. He has opened up the magazine's interior to design variations and considerably more art. What had been a rigid format is now considerably

more flexible, and it looks better — although the actual quality of the art has in many cases been inferior.

But the magazines under Bernhard lack substance. There's more gravy and less meat. This would appear to be due to two factors: first, his editor, whomever he or she may be, was picked for his or her convenience in location (living reasonably close to the publisher, in the Phoenix area of Arizona) rather than any apparent editorial qualifications. I have no idea what the editor's background is — and the magazines give no clue — but on the evidence of the published fiction, the editor is an amateur who can't tell good fiction from the less-than-good, and he or she is buying primarily from the slushpile where less-than-good is the rule. It would not surprise me if the editor is unpaid; he or she is, if paid at all, paid very poorly. Second, whether because of the lowest rate of pay in the field or for other reasons, Bernhard's editor has not succeeded in attracting material from any of the professionals in the field.

It's not that difficult a task. Top professionals now have a hard time finding magazines to serialize their novels. When I edited AMAZING and FANTASTIC I had no trouble coming up with novels from authors like Poul Anderson, Jack Vance, John Brunner, Avram Davidson, and many others — at 1¢ a word. The alternative was no serialization at all, and a few hundred bucks extra, plus additional exposure, is something few authors willingly turn down.

I also built up relationships with some of the field's better new writers (often by publishing their first stories), which kept stories coming from them long after they were in demand in high-paying markets. (Gordon Eklund sent me a new story just as I quit A&F, for example...) In this I was following the lead of editors like Bob Lowndes, who had put together magazines on shoe-string budgets with surprisingly little compromise in quality. In my opinion any editor can do this if he's willing to apply himself to the task.

Despite the badmouthing I've had to put up with over the years (largely from authors — like Spider Robinson say — whose contacts with me were minimal and who personally suffered none of the experiences they like to relate against me), I cared about science fiction and I cared about the fiction I published. I also cared about the authors I worked with. I had a publisher who never read the stories in the magazines, and who gave me little or no direction in that sense, leaving me free to do as I saw fit (within the context of his overall policies). I doubt very much that Bernhard cares any more for the actual stories being published in the magazines now, although he may read them. The difference seems to be that his editor cares only a little more about the stories than he does. They fill up the pages and they're (nominally) science fiction. What more could anyone want?

As long as a publisher follows such a penny-ante policy, and doesn't employ anyone willing to go beyond the basic job, spiffy packaging will offer only superficial improvements.

Something bigger is needed.

Whether it will be provided before it's too late to do any good is something I wouldn't want to bet on.

PAPER WARRIORS

PART II: BOARD GAMES

david nalle



The Ogre rounded the lip of the crater as shells from the three howitzers defending the enemy Command Post exploded all around it, bombarding the treads of the super-tank. From the south, three tanks and a missile-tank were catching up with the steel behemoth. A ring of six Ground Effects Vehicles blocked its path to the enemy command. They pounced in to strike at the ogre and then darted back out of range. Continuing its steady roll towards the Command Post, the Ogre brought its weapons to bear on the enemy force. A missile took out one of the tanks, while the missile-tank was crushed beneath the treads of the huge war-machine. The anti-personnel batteries scattered infantry, while the main and secondary batteries kept the GEVs at bay. A howitzer was crushed under the giant treads, which were beginning to show wear and slow the Ogre down. The Ogre was at last within range of the enemy Command Post, and it sent the full force of its arsenal of nuclear missiles thundering into the stronghold, destroying it in a cloud of radioactive dust. The Ogre, its mission accomplished, turned and limped slowly home across the battlefield.

Ogre is the first in Metagaming's (MGC) Microgame series. It explores the nature of land combat in the near future. With its companion game, GEV, it is one of the best sf board games on the market.

There are two types of sf fantasy board-game subjects. OGRE is a fine example of the group of games which simulate land combat. The second group is those games which deal with space combat. WARPGAR, also by MGC, is typical of these games. These two games in the Microgame series are useful as illustrations, because

they are simple and easy to explain. They are also cheap.

OGRE postulates a future battle between six types of fighting units: Howitzer, infantry, GEVs, missile-tanks, heavy tanks, and Ogres. Most of these are extensions of modern concepts in weaponry. The Ogres about which the game revolves are the most radical extrapolation from modern military technology. Ogres are automated, self-aware tanks, based on Keith Laumer's Bolos. They are the ultimate war machines.

OGRE is played on a 9x14in, stiff paper map. Terrain is clear ground with craters and rubble to obstruct movement. As with most other wargames, the board is divided up into hexagonal sections called hexes, for movement. Each hex is one space of movement allowance. Each type of unit has a different movement rate, printed on the counter that represents it. The slowest are the infantry and the Heavy Tanks, which move at 2 hexes a turn. The fastest are the GEVs, which move 4 hexes at the beginning of their turn, and may then retreat 4 more hexes after their attack. Howitzers are immobile.

Units also have different attack and defense strengths and different ranges for their weapons. The counters also show these. For example, howitzers have a 6 attack, a 1 defense, and an 8 hex range. Infantry attack and defend at 3, and have a range of 1 hex. A common defense tactic is to set up three howitzers to hold off the Ogre, while harassing it with the other units, and wearing down its treads to slow its movement. Combat is resolved by comparing the attack strengths of the attacking units with the defense strengths of the defending units, and rolling a die to find the result on the Combat Result Table. The defending units may be destroyed or disrupted, or undamaged. Disrupted units are immobilized for one turn. A 3:1 attack has a 2/3 chance of destroying the defender, and otherwise, will still disrupt him. The players alternate turns.

The game centers on the Ogres. There are two types, Ogres Mark III, and Ogres Mark V. They are played somewhat differently from the other units, in that they have several types of attacks, and can be attacked in several different areas. They mount a variety of weapons, including nuclear missiles, and anti-personnel guns. They can be attacked in the same way as other units, but the attacker chooses which area he wishes to attack. He can attack any of the weapons, or the treads, in an attempt to slow the Ogre's movement. These areas take damage from attacks, and can eventually be eliminated. The Mark V is about half as good as powerful as the Mark III.

The object of the game is to destroy the

enemy Command Post, or for the defender, to keep it from being destroyed. Improvised scenarios are also possible, using other units. GEV, the companion game, provides another map, more rules, and some additional units. The average game takes under an hour to play.

OGRE and similar games are based on the concepts created for traditional wargaming, with certain changes. Missile weapons have increased markedly in emphasis, and of course various extrapolated future or fantasy weapons have been added.

Space-conflict games, like WARPGAR examine the various areas of exploration and combat in space. There is a great deal of variety in design and concept between games. There are a number of completely different combat and movement systems in use.

WARPGAR is fairly typical of the simpler space games. It is the fourth in MGC's Micro-game series. It is for two players. The objective is to capture the stars held by your opponent. Two types of ships can be built, Systemships and Warships. Both types have similar combat capabilities, but only Warships can make interstellar movement, though they are capable of transporting systemships. Ship combat is with missiles and energy beams for offense, and energy screens for defense.

The 9x14in map shows 28 stars named after cities of the ancient world. Each star is connected to at least one other star by Warpline per movement factor, or in normal space a rate of one hex per movement factor. The concept of warlines is borrowed in part from The Mote in God's Eye by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle.

Combat between ships is resolved on a non-random table, depending on ship status, drive size, and weaponry. Ships can be injured, losing drive or weapons. Ships are built by the players using build points, which they may allocate as they wish. This makes a large variety in ship capabilities possible.

WARPGAR can easily be adapted for new scenarios and for multi-player games. The game system is simple and versatile. With the addition of a larger map, it can be played as a very challenging game for any number of people.

There are dozens of sf/fantasy games on the market which fit roughly into these two categories. New games are published every month. I will try to describe some of the more noteworthy games here.

STARFORCE (Simulations Publication, Inc.): This game outlines a war in our arm of the galaxy between Humanity and various other races. It has a very nice map and fairly straight-forward rules with multi-player scenarios and room to create new scenarios. It is played on a fairly large interstellar level, with limited three-dimensional movement. It is the first of SPI's STARFORCE TRILOGY. Cost: \$12.00.

STARSOLDIER (SPI): This is the second in the STARFORCE TRILOGY. It deals with the invasion of an enemy planet. It is somewhat similar to Avalon Hill's STARSHIP TROOPERS. It is an extension of STARFORCE to a smaller scale. Cost: \$12.00.

OUTREACH (SPI): This is the last in the STARFORCE TRILOGY. It expands the scope of the concept in STARFORCE to include the whole galaxy. It is mainly a game of exploration, with combat handled on an abstract level. The rules are complex

and somewhat confusing. The map is beautiful, and can be adapted for use with some other space games. It is probably the least good game in the trilogy. Cost: \$12.00. Trilogy Cost: \$32.00.

BATTLEFLEET MARS (SPI): This game covers war in the solar system, and the conquest of Mars. It is difficult to play, but it features a detailed space combat system which is well thought out, though very complex. The system is being used in some of SPI's upcoming space games. Cost: \$15.00.

SORCEROR (SPI): This is a very strange game, designed to cash in on the Fantasy boom quickly. It deals with battles between wizards and their minion on a really bizarre fantasy world. It is very contrived, but has a few good ideas in the maze of its rule. Cost: \$12.00.

SWORDS & SORCERY (SPI): This game covers army and personal combat in a fantasy world where magic is governed by the phases of the three suns, and places have silly names, like the Evelyn Woods, or the Hill of Avalon. It is fun to play, and includes the good ideas from SORCEROR without the bugs. There are a fair number of scenarios for any number of players. Cost: \$18.00.

WAR OF THE RING (SPI): This is the official Tolkien game. It has a large map of Middle Earth, and complete rules for the Wars of the Ring on army and personal combat levels. It is not a perfect game, but it is a good try at simulating the mood and action of LotR. It is somewhat complex for beginners, and takes a long time to set up. Cost: \$18.00.

COSMIC ENCOUNTER (Eon Products). This game has been very successful in sales in the last two years. It is not really a wargame, though it deals with interstellar conflict. The level of play is so

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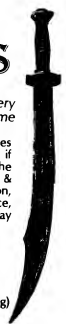
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abstract that the strategy becomes divorced from the concreteness of combat. Players get to play alien races with odd powers. With these powers to help them, they attempt to capture enemy solar systems. It is an easy game to learn and a lot of fun to play for 2 to 6 players. The basic game costs \$10.00, and there are 4 expansion sets for \$4.00 each.

CHITLIN I (MGC): This game presents food wars between the intelligent, but hungry, insects of the planet Chelan. It is very straight-forward, easy to learn, and quite simple. It tends to lose its charm after a few games, as it has a rather limited scope. Cost: \$12.00.

OLYMPICA (MGC): This is another planetary invasion game. This time, the objective is to destroy the hive mind of Mars, called the "Web". It is a fairly good game, but suffers from a lack of careful playtesting and is a bit slipshod. Cost: \$2.95.

BLACK HOLE (MGC): This is an imaginative and very innovative game of space combat on an asteroid. The trick is that the asteroid, "Dunkin", is donut shaped, and there is a small Black Hole at the centre of the hole. Two players play the troops of companies who wish to capture the three supply bases on the surface. They use various types of landing craft. It includes rules for missiles which enter orbit, and come back across the map, and rules to account for the gravity of the black hole. It is MGC's most original and well-thought-out Microgame. Cost: \$2.95.

RIVETS (MGC): This is a silly version of OGRE. It deals with combat between dull-witted armies of programmable robot fighting machines. It is fun to play and easy to learn. It gives a good background for some of the more complex Microgames. Cost: \$2.95.

MELEE (MGC): This is a game of man to man combat in a fantasy world, with rules for man to monster combat. It resembles some of the gladiatorial role playing games. It has some rather annoying weapon rules, and borders on being an oversimplified role-playing game. It is a companion game to WIZARD. Cost: \$2.95.

STOMP (Chaosiom): This is a very silly game. It pits 18 very small elves against the fleet of 1 very large giant, in an attempt to tip him over. It can be fun, but is rather whimsical. Cost: \$4.00.

DUNE (Avalon Hill): One of Avalon Hill's most recent releases, this is a complex adaptation of Frank Herbert's classic. It has some unwieldy rules, and a lot of unnecessary paraphernalia. It also tries too hard to please DUNE fans, and only succeeds in losing game playability.

STARSHIP TROOPERS (AH): This is a game based on

Robert Heinlein's book of the same name. It is playable but dull, and features the most horrible graphics ever made. I think they invented some new colors for the counters.

FREEDOM IN THE GALAXY (SPI): This new release is a "Star-Wars" imitation. It is a playable game, on several levels, like WAR OF THE RING. It is not exceptionally exciting.

DUNGEON (Tactical Studies Rules): This is a version of DUNGONS & DRAGONS to be played on a board. It is more or less, a simplification of an underground adventure, for several players. It is very easy to play, and designed for younger players.

Recently, new technology has brought wargaming into a new medium, which may be ideally suited for it, computers. With the increasing availability of small computers like the Pet, and Radio Shack's TRS 80, a large number of computer games are on the market in one form or another. Many of these are sf/fantasy games.

There are three ways in which computers are beginning to be used in wargaming. The first use of computers was as referees to control and monitor play-by-mail games. The first of these games was STARWEB, by Flying Buffalo Inc. Many groups also use computers in a more mundane way to keep records for play. The most recent aspect of this boom is the marketing of game cassettes for Mini-Computers.

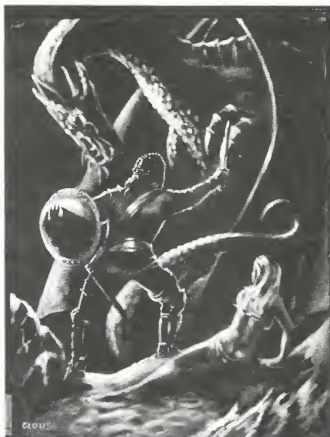
Mini-Computer games are just beginning to be sold, and will probably be in full swing as soon as SPI releases its line of games for the TRS 80. There are currently a number of non-wargames out, and a few wargames, the most popular of which is called TREX 80, which simulated some of the battles in the TV program.

The computer Play-by-Mail games all arise out of the concepts originated in STARWEB. There are several popular games covering different topics. They are generally run by the turn, with each player paying a set up fee and a turn fee. Turns are usually once every two weeks. STARWEB, and PELLIC QUEST both deal with interstellar conflict and exploration. TRIBES OF CRANE (S&S) is a game of warfare between migrating tribes in a fantasy world. SPLINTER GROUP (GSI) is the most recent PBM game, and deals with combat between rival groups in the near future.

SF/fantasy games are becoming more and more popular, with new technology and new approaches, they are more accessible than ever to the potential players. Games like OGRE and WARPWAR are simple enough for anyone to learn, and master. They are a good cheap introduction to the field and prepare the new player for the more realistic and more complex games that are available. From this point, the future could take wargaming in any direction, with new technology making games more realistic and more complete.



NEXT ISSUE: PAPER WARRIORS PART III—
ROLE-PLAYING GAMES



FOREST WARS OF THE HAVEN

Learning that Lord Toland is massing the creatures of the dark forest against them, THE HAVEN, last stronghold of mankind, launches a preemptive strike on Toland's camp in the Southern Forests.

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FOREST WARS is based on Graham Diamond's best selling fantasy novel "The Haven!" "THE HAVEN" has been so well received that already there are two sequels in print and two more to follow this year. FOREST WARS is not a conventional wargame with fantasy trimmings. It has been designed from the base up as fantasy simulation and includes such refinements as a combat matrix, leaders, and moral. Even with all this you can start to play the basic game in thirty minutes. The advanced game for more experienced players takes a bit longer.

FOREST WARS come with a beautiful full size map, colorful die cut silhouette counters, and an attractive rules book. The game comes packaged in a unique one piece bookcase box. The illustration above is a reduction in black and white of the full color front cover. There is no printing on the front of the box so as not to mar the reproduction of this original piece of art. The printing is on the back cover which has smaller full color original art. Compare the illustration above with what you find on other works. You will see the extra effort that went into this entire work.

FOREST WARS OF THE HAVEN may be purchased at the special introductory price of \$4.95. Or as a special offer you can obtain both the game FOREST WARS OF THE HAVEN, and the five books in the "Haven" series, "The Haven", "The Empire Princess", "Dungeons of Kuba", and two more-over 1500 pages of fantasy literature-for only \$13.95. Each book in the HAVEN series is fully illustrated.

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REVIEWS

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THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST by Robert A. Heinlein (Fawcett Columbine, 1980, 432pp., \$6.95) (ISBN 0-449-90019-3)

I've been looking forward to reading this book and writing this review for months. I wanted to be among the first to announce that Heinlein is back — that the Dean of Science Fiction has returned to his fold and written for us his Magnum Opus, book of the decade!

I only wish that my hopes would not have been so utterly crushed. The Number of the Beast is by far the worst book ever produced by a major science fiction writer. Yes, worse than Time Enough for Love, and a hundred times more disappointing — for this book had the potential, in scope and concept, of being the great crowning work of Robert Heinlein.

But virtually none of that potential is realized in this book. Indeed, it was a major effort to even finish it.

The story is initiated by a tried and true, but potentially interesting, piece of pulp science — a device which will translate an object along any of the six dimensions (three spatial dimensions, three "timelines"). This gives Heinlein all of time and space to play with. Furthermore, his characters soon discover that among the huge number of alternate universes among the other timelines (that number being six to the sixth power to the sixth power, the "number of the beast") there exists all the fictional universes and characters created in literature. The potential scope of this novel makes the Riverworld concept look like mainstream material.

Heinlein creates four new characters in the book, and eventually has them meet many of his other fictional characters, most notably Lazarus Long and crew. And, honest to god, all of these characters are really the same character. Heinlein has developed what he must feel is the perfect character, and he has completely populated this novel with dozens of versions of him/her. But most damning of all, this novel is well over 50% dialog. It's filled with these character(s) talking to themselves. Dialog goes on for pages and pages, until it is impossible to tell who is saying what, and of no particular importance. On top of that, these characters spend almost half of the dialog being cutesy clever. I could fill up an entire issue of Thrust just giving ludicrous examples.

To be kind to a once-great science fiction author, I won't even mention the ending, which falls into complete and incomprehensible chaos, as the book sputters into oblivion.

I am shocked and saddened at Mr. Heinlein's continued and unprecedented fall from greatness. Out of deep respect, I am going to consider his last work to have been The Moon is a Harsh Mistress.

We should wrap this book in brown paper and donate it to academia.

—Doug Fratz

TAKEOFF! by Randall Garrett (Starblaze Editions, 1980, \$4.95)

SF writers take themselves too seriously. They jealously guard the sanctity of their universe-bending concepts, dressing them up with stories hip-deep in bravado, dripping with angst, or throbbing with overwrought emotion. The true SF humorists, and in particular the parodists, are few and hard to find. There is Robert Sheckley, who has made a career out of lampooning SF conventions. John Sladek and Richard Lupoff (as Ova Hamlet) have written impeccable parodies. But there is plenty of room for more.

One of the more under-rated writers in the field is Randall Garrett, probably due to his meager output — an SF author is usually only as well known as his most recent book. Although best known for his Lord D'Arcy series, Garrett is also a fine humorist, and a perceptive parodist. Most of the odd little bits of his humorous writing have just been collected in Takeoff!, a deluxe Starblaze book, with appropriate wraparound cover by Kelly Freas.

Takeoff! is an eclectic collection. It ranges from SF poems, to straight parodies, to pastiches — such as Garrett's letter-perfect story written in the style of Eric Frank Russell, "The Best Policy."

"Look Out! Duck!" is a very funny story about a spaceship stranded in space a few weeks, on which five thousand ducks hatch and make themselves at home. Similar to Star Trek's "A Trouble With Tribbles," but ten times funnier.

"Masters of the Metropolis" is a description of

New York in the 1950's as experienced by someone from a few decades earlier:

As he stood on the platform, his sensitive ears detected the distant roar of a subway train. Gazing down the dark tunnel by whose egress the platform stood, he observed the cyclopean glare of the artificial light affixed to the blunt nose of the onrushing, all-metallic projectile. The entire cavern reverberated to the roar of the vehicle as it emerged from the tunnel with a mighty rush of wind and braked smoothly to a dead stop before his very feet.

The marvel of modern transportation which was to bear him on his journey to the great Metropolis of New York had arrived!

"No Connections" is a pastiche set in Asimov's Foundation universe, ending in a Feghoot-like pun. There is a funny western/fantasy, an appropriately grisly and turgidly written Lovecraft parody, a justification of Barsom (complete with tables, graphs and equations—makes perfect sense to me) and a series of letters that detail Isaac Newton's frustration when confronted with bureaucracy.

The only non-humorous story is about a small band of adventurers who manage to conquer a tremendous and sophisticated empire. The historical parallels in "Despoilers of the Golden Empire" are pointed and chilling. A favorite of mine is "The Cosmic Beat," a general satire of some of the more hip SF of the fifties.

But the funniest story in the book is an E.E. Smith parody, "Backstage Lensman," that will send anyone who has ever read the Lensman series into choking fits:

On a planet distant indeed from Tellus, on a frigid lightless globe situated within an almost completely enclosing hollow sphere of black interstellar dust, in a cavern far beneath the surface of that abysmally cold planet, a group of entities indescribable by, or to man stood, sat, or slumped around a circular conference table.

Though they had no spines, they were something like porcupines; though they had no tentacles, they reminded one of octopuses; though they had no wings or beaks, they seemed similar to vultures; and though they had neither scales nor fins, there was definitely something fishy about them.

—Steve Brown

LORD VALENTINE'S CASTLE by Robert Silverberg
(Harper and Row, 1980, 444pp., \$12.50)
(ISBN 9-06-01406-7)

In the illustrious career of Robert Silverberg, we've seen Silverberg-the-sf-adventure-writer, Silverberg-the-new-wave-stylist, Silverberg-the-introspective-philosopher, and Silverberg-the-transcendental-theorist, among many others.

What we see in *Lord Valentine's Castle*, Silverberg's first novel in several years, is Silverberg-the-master-fantasy-storyteller, and a very pleasing glimpse it turns out to be. He has gone back to the basics, and put his years of writing experience to good use.

The finely crafted narrative of this book contains no real surprises, and none are really needed. It is the story of an amnesiac transient who begins to discover the fact

that he is really the world's rightful but illegally de-throned ruler, who must regain power in order to save his semi-utopian world from eventual chaos. Through skillful handling, the protagonist's introspective musings over the meanings and obligations of power, as well as the fascinating and believable world used as the story's background, ring invariably true, even though if given time, the reader can begin to see that, like almost all fantasy worlds, this world is based on the highly questionable assumption that human nature tends towards being totally good or totally evil, with only a slim grey area between comprised of the temporarily ignorant.

The one problem with the book is that towards the end of it, the final scenario became inevitable. This must have occurred to Silverberg, as the final chapters rush quickly towards this obvious conclusion, with only one small surprise desperately added, and having little impact. I found myself quickly scanning these last few chapters, involving the protagonist's final ascent to Lord Valentine's Castle to regain his throne.

Still, although this may not be Robert Silverberg's



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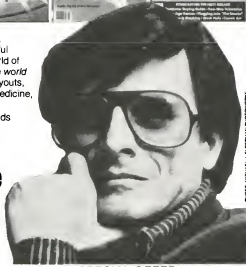


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best book, it is sure to please both fantasy fans and, with its well constructed and believable science fiction background, science fiction fans alike.

—Doug Prattz

EYES OF FIRE, by Michael Bishop, (Pocket Books, 1980, \$2.25) (ISBN 0-671-82835-5)

This one is the exception; let me explain.

I have searched them out in the dim, myopic alleys of bookstores, the bottomless rockpiles of conventions, and on the meticulously haphazard bookshelves of friends; never have I found a poorly written story by Michael Bishop. Yet, always I hope to find one so superior that it would knock the optical receptors off a hard science buff, or paralyze the sword hand of an adventure fan. Not that "Death & Designation Among the Asadi" or "The Samurai and the Willows" were not excellent works; they just did not have that overpoweringchutzpah that sets the brain on fire in a wide variety of readers. Also, I tend to agree with Le Guin's hypothesis that the "Stalin in the Soul" dictates too often how we read and write science fiction; and I respect Mr. Bishop immensely for having the singular will to stand back from that temptation, that easier road to recognition. But, frankly, I will admit that I am most affected by sf that overloads the synapses at all levels: basic concept, characterization, emotion, sense of wonder, intellect, detail, sensitive handling... Well folks, this one has it all; snatch a copy and grab the nearest easy chair.

Don't get me wrong now; I am not stating that Eyes of Fire is accessible to everyone. Bishop has one of the largest vocabularies in sf, even the college grads are going to be jumping to their Merriam-Websters. The basic plot elements are not exactly handled in a manner you could call conventional either. Overall, however, this work pushes all the right buttons.

The book includes scenes in and outside of a starship; clones; two races of aliens; interalien politics; a quest; several crises; an intricate problem to solve; growth and soul searching in the main character; telepathy; hints of prescience; and much more. These are only building blocks though, it is the handling that counts. Bishop's handling of the impacts caused by the death of a clone-parent, on his clone-spring, explores territory only touched on in Le Guin's "Nine Lives". Bishop leapt beyond the horizons of Le Guin's androgenous alien concepts of The Left Hand of Darkness with the Tropeans; they chose to permanently adopt the "male", logic-oriented mode of kemmer, and voluntary "females" were considered insane and were exiled. Bishop establishes friendship between his main character, Seth Latimer, and a Kierli alien; and he makes blood-ties and lifetime responsibilities between Latimer and a Tropean governor. Here is Weinbaum's form of sympathetic alien/human relations carried to a realistic limit. The world building and alien building in Eyes of Fire is sound, even the invented words seem well made. In almost every detail, Eyes of Fire is crafted intelligently.

Here is the big catch though. If you are looking for an all-synapse-burning blockbuster that reaches like a glass tower into the starry heavens, forget Eyes of Fire. It is not the type of sf that pushes to the heights of wonder. Instead it is a probing, disturbing, moving reflection on humanity; as well as a look through at the potentials of tomorrow. Bishop's skill is at plumbing to the depths, and his basic tool is a two-way glass. From all indications, there will be a dirth of fine novels in 1980, they will have to go a long distance to surpass this effort.

NOTES: Eyes of Fire is a complete re-write of Michael Bishop's first novel, Funeral for the Eyes of Fire. Only the titles are similar.

The packaging is poor: Front and back blurbs are both misleading, and the Tropean on the cover lacks a dascra around its neck.

—Robert Frazier

THE UNSLEEPING EYE by D. G. Compton (Pocket Books, New York, 1980, 256 pgs., \$2.25)
WINDOWS by D. G. Compton (Berkley Putnam, New York, 1979, 255pgs., \$10.95)

Here are two novels by a popular English writer who began his career back in the sixties and who has gained something of a following within the field of science fiction here in the United States. The Unsleeping Eye is a reprint of the 1974 English edition (titled The Continuous Katherine Mortenhoe), and Windows is a sequel to The Unsleeping Eye.

The first novel is about a reporter for NTV news who, via the miracle of micro-surgery, becomes the Man-With-The-Eyes. There is the Human Destiny Show, you see, which is very popular with viewers because in a world where disease is virtually conquered, entertainment about real live people with real live health problems is rare. But a woman of forty, Katherine Mortenhoe, is pronounced terminally ill and given only four weeks to live. Rod, the Man-With-The-Eyes, works a deal with Katherine to "watch" her die. Everything Rod sees, of course, is transmitted to TV viewers.

Well...this is a cute idea, but that's about as far as it goes. Compton's writing is a bit stilted, there is a total lack of realism in this story that

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disturbs the sense of plot; I mean, there is a woman dying here! Very human stuff to write about...but all Compton seems to care about is his super-reporter, and the super-reporters family problems, and what a bitch it is to be a super-reporter, and on, and on, and on. The highlight of the book was the bargaining between Katherine and Rod regarding the monetary worth of her death for NTV. And if the first novel was bad, the sequel was equally rotten; in Windows Rod has blinded himself, which is to say that he has disconnected all of his fancy micro-circuitry, because he no longer wants to be a part of NTV's deranged idea of family entertainment. Rod and his wife get back together, and his son tries to understand that his dad can't see anymore. There is very little action and/or suspense in this book, though the characterization is a bit better than in the first novel. Generally speaking, if asked "what happened in this story?" the answer would have to be "nothing". The worst part of it all is that the second novel, Windows, is still not the end of this series. Near the end of the book Rod begins to reconsider the possibility of getting his sight back, and so it is safe to assume that a third novel is forthcoming, in which the protagonist will regain his sight and skip and hop around for two hundred or so pages demonstrating how very wonderful it is to see again.

Not recommended.

--David Pettus

CAT PEOPLE AND OTHER INHABITANTS OF THE OUTER REGIONS
by Karen Kuykendall (Desert Diamond Company, 1979,
\$9.95) (ISBN 0933998-00-7)

We are now in what seems to be the height of the small press limited edition book trend, with the strongest emphasis on full color art books.

Cat People is a book of thirty full color art prints on high quality glossy stock, all by artist Karen Kuykendall. Despite the title, only half of the paintings feature cats—the works are all based on original fantasy and science fiction concepts.

Kuykendall's use of color is quite good, although leaning a bit too much towards darker shades—shades which would suit a darker and more ominous style than that Kuykendall exhibits. The book is extremely consistent in style, but it is a style that lacks depth, in the figures and background, as well as in the range of moods. Still, it is a style that produces some striking, if static, scenes.

Any evaluation of this book would invariably be highly subjective—I suggest prospective buyers look this over at a convention or bookstore. It should take only a few minutes to decide if this book is your cup of tea.

—Doug Fratz

A VOICE OUT OF RAMAH by William Glass (Del Rey, 1979,
\$1.75) (ISBN 0-345-28021-0)

For reasons I'll get back to later, I almost missed this book. Reading The Doppelganger Gambit, her second novel, alerted me to the fact that Lee Killough is an entertaining new writer whose stuff, in that instance, I enjoyed mightily. So I thought to give A Voice Out of Ramah a try.

I'm glad I did.

In the science fiction of Heinlein/Anderson/Niven/Pournelle you've run across the rationale which asserts that, in times of stress and expansion for the race, a male-dominated society obsessively protective of women is proper for the continuance of the species.

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THE FANTASY ART OF
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A Voice Out of Ramah quietly turns that notion on its side, if not on its head.

Two weeks after a shipload of semi-fundamentalist, neo-Anglican, male-dominated colonists landed on the planet Marah, all but seventeen of its four hundred men were dead. Each generation in the five hundred years since has seen 90% of its males die during puberty.

The male minority which survives is the spiritual and temporal authority on Marah, with all the rights and privileges attendant thereto. Yet to be male on Marah is to grow up afraid, not looking past puberty. It is being spoiled with treats denied girls; being protected, almost imprisoned on the ranch stations while your sisters are out on the prairies, riding the tyrannosaur raps, learning their duties.

For, as ordained by the Old and New Testaments, men have dominion. And women serve.

They cook and clean. They herd and breed and break the raps. They keep the peace, maintain trade. They escort men when they travel to keep them safe. They excavate the metals from the cities of Marah's vanished pre-human inhabitants.

For children, they ask two men for their seed (inheritance is matrilineal) which, the ratio being what it is, they will likely get from the Artificial Insemination clinics.

And only mothers and sisters are allowed to sit deathwatch over their stricken sons and brothers.

Now a ship has come to inhabit Marah from another colony to seal the planet a shuttlebox, an Equipotential Transfer Portal, which will open Marah to the trade (and medicine) of the Galaxy. A scout-craft lands, and its two passengers become guests of Kedar Jerad Cloud Joseph, Shepherd of the Gibeon Temple. Liaison officer Alesdra Pontokourous captures Brother Jered's interest with her outspoken intelligence, but her male companion catches the Marah virus.

For the first time Jered sits deathwatch, and learns that the death is not, as he has been told, a humane and merciful slipping off into eternal sleep. And, after Alesdra has gone northward to the far side of Marah's single continent, carrying her mission to Marah's ruling Bishop in the capitol of Eridu, Jered is left at Gibeon to wrestle with his aroused conscience.

For he knows, as a select number of the upper hierarchy knows, that an immunity was bred into the population by the fourth generation on Marah, and that the privileged male minority has since been maintained (according to the vision Divinely revealed to Davis Moses in year 105) by the random poisoning of enough of the boys attending Middle School to assure the continuance of the 10% male-female ratio.

Shaken as he is by the earthman's death, Jered still must temper his conscience as he is caught up with factional maneuverings against him within the Temple. Those who resent his election to Shepherd, who feel he lacks unwavering commitment, have schemed to show up Jered's weakness by arranging to have Isalah, the son of Ashasem Kirithaim Sky Joseph, Jered's twin sister, transferred from Eridu to the Middle School at Gibeon.

Jered, now torn because he cannot save one boy's life without becoming guilty of the deaths of all the rest, grabs onto the idea of telling David Mose's vision to Alesdra, in hopes she can use the power represented by her ship to blackmail the Bishop into stopping the culling.

And the only way he can cross the continent unescorted to reach her is for him to trade the long locks and step-restricting robes of a man for the close-cropped hair and long-striding jeans of a woman.

Jered's disguised travels are the best part of the book. He falls in with a crew of women herding

rapas to market and learns something of the comradeship, the society, and the relationships (tanglewate, sisterwife) that have evolved in the 90% of Marah he has never really known. (There is a marvelous scene where a man visits the group and Jered shows unseemly resentment of the male arrogance his companions have long learned to take for granted.)

As the novel's focus is on Jered's struggle with his conscience, it ends when Jered has found rapprochement with himself, even though Marah is still in upheaval for his having done so. (Hopefully Killough will someday return to Marah a generation or two after Jered's time to show the society that finally resolved itself from the chaos Jered wrought.)

A good book. An entertaining first novel with several good, well-motivated characters. A book whose sly feminism is kept as a controlled background to the foreground events of a strong story. But a book which the sf bookstore I work for stripped most of the covers from for return credit as it sunk into unthought oblivion after a full month's cover-out display on the new book rack.

Why?

On-the-spot blame could be placed on the Van Dergen cover, which shows a downangle shot of an adolescent and androgynous Jered (he is thirty-eight in the book), knees and hands hooked over branches, looking down past his shoulder at the blue dinosaur which has chased him up a tree. It is a scene from the book, but completely inappropriate, more suited to an adolescent sf adventure in the Alan Dean Foster vein.

The actual blame, however, lies with Del Rey's art department. This is the art department which has packaged Philip K. Dick to look like Robert A. Heinlein, Evangeline Walton to look like Love's Rampant Lust historicals, James Branch Cabell to look like god-knows-what, and seems committed to a policy of reissuing books with worse covers than whatever they had before (with the exception of Michael Whelan's Barsom covers). (Ever try to explain to someone looking for space adventure that a book showing a brontosaurus standing in midair nibbling at treetops on its cover is really about a multispecies hospital orbiting on the Galactic rim?)

For the most part, the best of Del Rey's current covers are those carried over from Del Rey's hardcover editions, which must be packaged to appeal to an older impulse buyer than the paperbacks. But new writers whose first paperback efforts are saddled with an inappropriate cover due to Del Rey's juvenile packaging policies may never find their proper audiences.

Luckily, Del Rey's presentation of Lee Killough's *The Doppelganger Gambit* is tasteful and right, and people who liked it can be steered back to discover the pleasures of *A Voice Out of Ramah*.

Go, thou, and discover likewise.

--Bill Glass

THE LOVERS by Philip Jose Farmer (Del Rey Books, 1980, 200pp., \$2.25) (ISBN 345-28691-X)

Seldom does a reprint novel appear in science fiction with the historical value of this novel.

The Lovers is the novel written in 1961, expanded from the story written by Philip Jose Farmer in 1952. This is one of the few sf novels which one can point to and say, this is a classic, representing a landmark and a turning point in the history of sf literature, and not be bursting into hyperbole. For this is the first story in sf in which sex, as an essential part of the plot, is treated in a mature manner.

Yet, there is no really salacious scene in this book, nor is it in any way explicitly daring, by today's standards. The years have taken their toll—

but to understand what this book meant to sf is to understand how far we have come.

—Doug Fratz

THE VISITORS by Clifford Simak (Del Rey Books, 1980, \$9.95) (ISBN 345-28-441-0)

Simak's idea is a good one: life-forms native to space itself, space their natural habitat — capable of interstellar travel, and possessing anti-gravity capacity. Physically, they are about a story high and a block long; they consist of Silicon-polymer, a ductile mock silicate, and are solid black.

The first one lands in Lone Pine, Minnesota. There it begins plowing through a nearby forest, knocking over trees as it goes, consuming, digesting them emitting bales of cellulose in its wake. After doing this a while, it begins to bud a score or more of similar, but smaller, long, ebony, sentient boxes, which promptly proceed to devour all the cellulose mother has spewed out. About this time more Visitors settle to Earth, start ravaging the woods, and breeding too.

It's all quite imaginative, and interesting concept.

Unfortunately, it just has no dramatic potential. Most of the verbiage consists of many viewpoint-shifts to relate information about the Visitors — pressroom conferences, telephone talks, dinner conversations, etc.

And as everyone waits, and waits, and waits, the evident lack of purpose begins to show, and make the story drag. Alternating from one discussion-group to another Simak keeps rambling on and on, shifting around, but nothing really happens; he's stuck with his Visitors, and can't figure out what to do with them. Finally, about halfway through he starts killing them off, though he doesn't explain why — but after a bit, he realizes he can't do that, for the story would be over. So he has the latest generation of Visitors acquire the shape of cars, flying, free cars — and everyone talks about that for a while, allowing all the details to be explained to the reader. When this grows tiresome, he has the succeeding generation take the shape of houses — and this is discussed at length too, though not as much as the cars. And if houses aren't enough, the Visitors also start making people, though we get just a glimpse of this — which is really exasperating, as this sounds so promising. Ah, well.

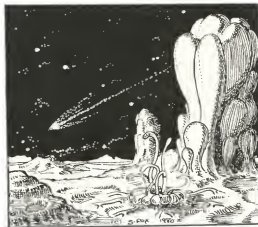
Anyway, it all fizzles out rather than ends, with the President and White House staff agreeing that changes and flexibility will be necessary for the future.

Simak examines the ramifications of all the disturbances the Visitors create fairly well. The effects on the ecology, the auto industry, the housing industry, and the economy in general, are all well thoughtout. A decent job of extrapolation.

For me the main failing is that I got tired of waiting and waiting and seeing so little happen — or rather being told what's happening. Also, most of what happens evokes no more than superficial interest: throughout no one has any tangible problems, chooses any goals, faces any obstacles.

Instead, interest is subordinated solely by the novelty of the subject matter, the character interactions, and the high quality of writing. Simak handles all three well, but they're just not enough. This is one of Simak's weaker books, like *Mastodons*, rather than one of his spectacular triumphs like *The Fellowship of the Talisman*.

—Lee Smith



paging through it, I was quickly hooked. It is nothing less than a "future textbook" (allegedly for cadets of Star Fleet Academy in 2215) telling how the *Star Trek* scenario evolved from present-day spaceflight. It begins with Sputnik, moves through the Apollo program, to the Shuttle, on into the 1980's, and you don't notice the transition between real and imaginary. The extrapolation is extremely good, and the result is a pseudo-history a lot more plausible than many of those used for sf novels. The sociology is a bit simplistic. World government and peace are achieved quickly to get Earth history out of the way, but where the concentration is on technology or alien contact, the authors are at their best.

The irony of it all is that *Spaceflight Chronology* is better science fiction than *Star Trek* itself. It fills in huge gaps left by the show (I suspect one of the fascinations for Trekkies has been that the creation was so incomplete, leaving room for everybody and his brother to get into the act.) and where the original *Star Trek* material appears later on, it seems an amateurish, embarrassing intrusion, with its paper-mache' worlds and silly, anthropomorphic aliens. Those which predate Captain Kirk and crew and invented by the Goldsteins are by far the more imaginative creations.

—Darrell Schweitzer

SABELLA, OR THE BLOOD STONE by Tanith Lee (DAW Books, 1980, \$1.95)

Vampire stories were originally written from the point of view of the victim. Recently, the focus has shifted to the vampire. In *Sabella* (DAW, 1980), Lee has done both. *Sabella* is both hunter and prey.

Like *The Birthgrave*, Lee's first adult novel (DAW, 1975), *Sabella* features a beautiful, guilt-ridden, self-hating heroine with powers beyond those of her community and a lot of fear about using them. Other common themes are death and rebirth, the search for purpose in events, and a thoroughly masochistic concept of romantic love (I don't remember how many times Uastis of *The Birthgrave* gets raped, and I'm not re-reading it to find out). *Sabella* habitually uses sex as bait for her victims; "Even with the basest of them, I feel a concern to make them happy (p. 31)." When describing sex-for-pleasure, however, she talks only in terms of what she cannot do. "I couldn't resist...I couldn't do a thing. I couldn't even be wise, or try to give him pleasure. I could only take (p. 147)." She is, in other words, entirely passive; and this seems necessary to her. The masochism of *The Birthgrave*, though, is under better artistic control in *Sabella*.

STAR TREK SPACEFLIGHT CHRONOLOGY by Stan Goldstein and Fred Goldstein, illustrated by Rich Sternback, (Wallaby/Pocket Books, 1980, 192pp., \$8.95)

This one really surprised me. I never expected to find a *Star Trek* spinoff book interesting, but while

Partly, it is because Lee has done a better job of working out the plot. Uastis' conviction that she is damned is belatedly ascribed to a childhood trauma - by the deus ex machina (Literally. Her shrink is a computer - most out of place on a barbarian world.) which resolves the plot of *The Birthgrave*. Sabella has a good deal to feel guilty about: "I'm a lady with a past all littered with dead young gentlemen callers (p.121)."

Partly, it is because the Revivalist Christianity of New Mars gives Lee a greater range of metaphor and imagery. Like the devil, Sabella quotes scripture. Together with sex, Latin runs through the novel like the music (Prokofiev, Nils, Stravinsky) Sabella plays in her blue-shadowed home. The mixture of rebelliousness and self-abnegation with which Sabella reacts to men is the same as her attitude toward God. Jesus, too, is probably a threat and maybe a promise.

Sabella is a well-written book, even a good one; with vivid descriptions of New Mars' mining boom towns. It is lively, colorful, well-paced and sometimes funny. Sabella's description of Jesus as a vampire (she wants to curse God and die) is witty as well as blasphemous. The final "explanation" of how she came to be a vampire is utterly unconvincing, but no one is going to read the book to find out about her biochemistry anyway. Her feelings are a lot more interesting.

--Elizabeth Stanford

BARLOWE'S GUIDE TO EXTRATERRESTRIALS by Wayne Douglas Barlowe and Ian Summers, (Workman Publishing Company, 1979, 146 pgs., \$7.95)

Science-fiction in the 1930's was traditionally the home of the BEM (bug-eyed monster) which lived on the cover of every pulp magazine. Usually, they were as ugly as sin and hostile as all-get-out. In the T.V. program "The Outer Limits" of the early 1960's, a much more sympathetic view was taken of such creatures, some of which were persecuted by ugly and hostile humans. Certainly, it is true that if we ever meet up with any real extraterrestrial life, we may have to prepare ourselves for a psychic shock seeing that all intelligent life does not come packaged in our basic model. (Some U.F.O. reports indeed appear to feature creatures every bit as odd as you will find in this new book.)

Introduced by the Brothers Hildebrandt (who comprise one of the best illustrating teams around today), this book deals with all sorts of weird beasts from the pages of the most famous science-fiction novels. They range from the Ahyomnente (Cycle of Fire by Hal Clement) to the Volantian (Children of the Lens by E.E. "Doc" Smith) and there is a full description of their physical characteristics, habitat and culture. On the page opposite the text, there is an illustration in full color of the whatever-it-is. Admittedly, sf fans like to create their own impressions of extraterrestrials in their imaginations, and there is bound to be some quibbling over details, but such is the skill with which these paintings are rendered that anyone who does so with me will have an argument of their hands.

This book falls part way between straight sf illustration and a sf encyclopaedia, and is completely unique in itself. There is a sketchbook section at the back showing some of the preliminary sketches that were employed in the creating of this book, as well as a large fold-out in the middle detailing the relative sizes of the critters.

Creatures from the novels of Harry Harrison, Jack Williamson, Isaac Asimov, Gordon R. Dickson, James Blish, Robert Silverberg, Larry Niven, Alan Dean Foster, H.P. Lovecraft, C.H. Cherry, Damon Knight and Jack L. Chalker are represented, as are others too

numerous to name. Some of the extraterrestrials are rather friendly-looking (I refuse to use the word cute), but others you would not want to meet on a dark night in a back alley.

The convincing thing is the anatomical details that have been rendered in the illustrations. You have to almost believe such joints, mandibles and skin textures could really exist - somewhere. On this planet alone, we have a mighty odd variety of animal life. If you don't think so, just consider yourself as a visitor from Mars who sees a giraffe for the first time. The only one I feel dubious about is the Chulplex in the book "Master of the Maze" by Avram Davidson. I read the book, and it was my impression that they were more insect than humanoid as depicted here. However, my opinion takes nothing away from the artists rendering, as it is very interesting to see another conception of the same thing.

It seems that we are getting quite a talented crew of young artists now who grew up on science-fiction and are putting their talents to good use.

--W. Ritchie Benedict

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY AUTHORS, A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FIRST PRINTINGS OF THEIR FICTION, ed. L.W. Currey (G.K. Hall, 571 pp., 1980, \$50.00)
INDEX TO SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGIES AND COLLECTIONS compiled by William Contento, (G.K. Hall, 608 pp., 1980, \$28.00)
CLIFFORD SIMAK: A PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHY, by Muriel Becker (G.K. Hall, 149pp., 1980 \$18.00)
THEODORE STURGEON: A PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHY by Lahna F. Diskin (G.K. Hall, 105 pp., 1980, \$16.00)
JACK WILLIAMSON: A PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BIOGRAPHY by Robert Myers (G.K. Hall, 93 pp., 1980, \$12.00)

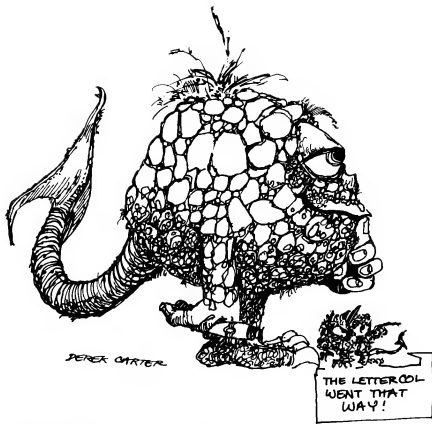
All of these books are basically for libraries, and for such they are quite worthwhile. Rich fans or specialist collectors will also be interested. The Currey book will also become a standard reference item for book dealers in years to come, as it not only lists first editions of most contemporary (and a few classic) science fiction authors, but describes them. This is where you go to see if you've got the genuine article. Currey, one of the leading rare book dealers in the field, was the obvious person to compile such a work. Since works other than science fiction are listed, you'll find some surprises paging through it, like who wrote just how many porno novels under what names.

Contento's index is exactly what it sounds like, very useful for finding stories. Listings are by author, story, and book contents. It will be for anthologies what the Day and M.I.T. indexes are for magazines: indispensable.

The three bibliographies give exhaustive listings of fiction and sf-related non-fiction, plus material about the authors (with summaries of what the reviews said, giving at a glance what critical reactions has been like). Various appendices provide even more information. Simak is briefly interviewed, but the others are not. Obviously anyone doing research on these authors must consult these volumes before going further. If they're your favorite writers, you may find the money for these well spent.

My one regret is that the only time I'm mentioned in the Simak book is for stomping on Shakespeare's Planet with hominoid boots. Actually I have enjoyed much of Simak's work. I respect him highly. I just found that one more than a little disappointing.

--Darrell Schweitzer



COUNTER-THRUSTS

letters

Diane E. Duane
(address unknown)
California

A friend recently dropped a copy of Thrust 13 in my lap so that I could see the review of *The Door Into Fire* that Steve Brown had written.

It was a really positive review, and it left me a bit bemused, as nearly all the reviews have been leaving me lately.

It is similar to what happened to me a couple of years ago while nursing at Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic in New York, my first real job, and a lively one. Too lively sometimes, with people throwing lamps, and chairs, and each other, and overdosing, and climbing out windows and screaming and yelling and otherwise enjoying being crazy. I survived all of that—one of the few things in this life for which I allow myself pride—and when I'd finally had enough, I sent in my letter of resignation, thinking, "Oh hell, I did okay for a first job, no one suicided while I was watching them, let's try something else now." So maybe you can understand my bewilderment when the Chief of Nursing called me for a Little Talk, and instead of offering me the usual platitudes about going on to other things, offered me a job two grades above the one I had held, and an amazing raise in pay, if I'd just stay and keep working. Words like "unusually high empathy rating" and "unusual ability" and "high professionalism" littered the air. All of this was no use—southern California was calling my name—but I still walked out of that office shaking my head in total bemusement.

Now, *The Door Into Fire* comes out, and it's a fair start for a beginner, I feel: I'll do my best to do better next time. But these reviews keep turning up on my doorstep—Steve Brown's the latest in the series—and the things they're saying about a beginner's first effort!

Mr. Brown in particular. His praise is glowing, but it makes me nervous—not so much from fear of what the Gods do to those who indulge in hubris. More from a fondness for keeping things in proportion. There's an awful lot of hyperbole in that review.

Most disturbing to me is this line: "it is with great awe and humility (not to mention jealousy) that

I report that this...is...a first novel..." Give me a break! Awe is for total eclipses and other forms of seeing God, no? (Though nowadays it does seem to be creeping into Datsun commercials.) Humility, low self-image (check your local dictionary) is no asset to anyone who writes and should be excoriated ASAP. As for jealousy, that's even worse—it saps the strength necessary to go out and do likewise. If *Fire* made Mr. Brown jealous, I hope he's gotten over it. I'd feel awful if he hadn't.

Also, on the other hand, Mr. Brown seems to have trouble with David Gerrold's introduction to the book, calling it "infantile, flip and stupid" and other such mildly uncomplimentary things. I like that introduction. It accurately catches my day-to-day mood and affect—the way it sounds is the way I am. It was a marvelous gift from someone who's been a ruthless teacher and honest critic, and is still a dear friend and a powerful influence on my work. I'm proud to have his words in my book.

Oh, and by the way—I enjoy your magazine...

[This is the first letter I've ever received from an author complaining that a review of his/her book was too positive. I do understand your objection though, and can think of quite a few instances wherein a new sf author's early over-praise has seemingly hampered his or her further development—the swelled head syndrome. I certainly hope this won't happen to you, Diane—but it undoubtedly won't, judging from your letter. If you do seem to be having problems in the future, though, just let me know—I'll have a reviewer tear apart your next book if it'll help. As for the introduction, I must admit that I had a reaction similar to Steve Brown's. I received advance galleys of your book from Dell, immediately read the introduction, and then shelved the book for later reading. It did not communicate to me that I must-read-this-book-now feeling. I'm glad that David's introduction communicated to you, but I don't think it communicated with most of the book's potential readers in the same way. —DDE/

I WONDER IF
THE LETTER
IS THE
INSULT OR
THE INJURY
?



Jerry Pournelle
12051 Laurel Terrace
Studio City, CA 91604

I agree with Ted White—something not as uncommon as one might suppose, given that the only significant interaction

I ever had with Ted was at a time when our roles (he as editor of *Fantastic* and *Amazing*, me as President of SFWA) forced us into fairly sharp conflict.

Science fiction fandom is quite unique; certainly SF fandom as a whole has little in common with Star Trek fandom. This is a bit surprising, and worth someone's dissertation for a Ph.D. in sociology; we have here a genuine case of cultural traditions so strong as to survive enormous dilution of the original culture population. As Ted says, cons were originally put on by fans so they could meet each other; the professionals were welcome guests but hardly "superstars". Now, however, a great portion of those attending a Worldcon have had very little to do with any other fan activities. Despite this, much of the flavor of the old conventions remains. I've noticed that people who seem very star-struck at the Meet The Authors Party (traditionally held very early on in the con) don't act that way by the last day.

Regarding that pleasant subject, money; while it may be that SF's highest paid authors are adidgets compared to Harold Robbins and James Michener, so are the highest paid authors of any genre. Even so, I seriously doubt that Mr. Heinlein, who is reported by *Publisher's Weekly* to have sold over a million copies of each of some thirty books, need fear the wolf at the door. Moreover, SF books tend to stay in print. *Note in God's Eye*, although never on the best-seller list, continues to do very well indeed, and has outsold many best-sellers which have long vanished. My market intelligence sources tell me that the top selling genre is women's hystericals (average 250,000), but the SF line is often more profitable because it continues to move in the back list.

I'm further told by a top editor (who works in all genre, not just SF) that in theory the advance ought to be about equal to the first year's royalties. But my advances from strictly SF editors have been about half that much.

Thus, Ted is right; SF, by working the reader harder, has a lower sales potential. But SF readers read more books. My advice to beginning authors is to hang in there, build up a body of books which will continue to earn money, and you won't have to live off the advances.

Michael Bishop on blurbing is worth the price of the magazine if by itself. *Editor's Note*; Jerry also wrote three pages regarding the Heinlein/Freiff/JPL "Incident", clarifying several points in last issue's Freiff letter, and going on to discuss general problems involved with SF writers acting as journalists as such events, a letter too long to publish here. Anyone who is interested in reading the letter can send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Thrust Publications for a free photocopy.

Arthur D. Hlavaty
250 Colligni Avenue
New Rochelle, NY 10801

I have been picking up your excellent magazine and enjoying it, but have not been inspired to comment until I

saw David Bischoff's "Droppings."

Despising pleasures one once loved is an old story; as Shakespeare said, "Past reason hunted, and no sooner had, past reason nated." This phenomenon seems quite common with science fiction, and it saddens me when someone can only lash out with bitterness, as Bischoff does.

To me, science fiction, at its best, represents a way of looking at the most important questions—the nature of existence, the correspondence between appearance and reality, the relation between the physical world and the world of Mind, etc. If I no longer read as much SF as I once did, it is because SF is so rarely at its best, because so much is content to rehash the same old answers. Still, I would no more wish to "outgrow" such interests than I would wish to outgrow sex.

I realize that some who were once interested in these things are forced to turn their attention to matters of business and family, while others find that these questions are no longer important to them. I do not quarrel with people changing; I merely protest when some, for whatever reasons, feel the need to condemn their former interests as "adolescent" or "sophomoric," as if those who did not move on to other things were necessarily retarded. If David Bischoff wishes to interest himself in communication and other good things, I wish him well, but I suggest that he begin by avoiding blanket condemnations.

I think you read more into David's column than he put there—it was not his farewell-to-SF speech. David had two points to make, both of which I think are very valid, and interconnected. First, the collecting syndrome, if started young, can be an emotional trap—it can lead to a placing of emotional importance on objects and possessions, and the ideas that go with them, to a degree they may no longer deserve, and end up being a heavy anchor which can stifle one's freedom. The other point is that many SF fans are still over-defensive about SF, and are unable to view it in proper perspective, the "logic" being, if all those mundanes say SF is all bad, it must be all good. —DDF

ANYBODY THAT HANGS OUT
IN FANZINES AND DENOUNCES
FANDOM IS ASKING FOR IT,
BISCHOFF.



Darrell Schweitzer
113 Deepdale Road
Stafford, PA 19087

I can sympathize with Dave Bischoff's desire to clear out all the books which have been cluttering up his apartment.

The big difference between the two of us is I wouldn't have sold them to a dealer in one fell swoop, doubtless taking a loss. I would have tried to retail them myself, making a profit. (A profit is not without honor.) I am always selling my books at a trickle. Of course in a few months or years, all that space he has

emptied will fill up again. If you clean out the mushrooms but leave the spores...

As for the panel Dave was on, I was there, and I am not convinced that science fiction is primarily read by adolescents. It's an old cliché, which is why the other panelists were so defensive. But reader surveys and bookstore owners tell another story. SF readers are mostly male, 23 to 30, and college educated.

Ballard's statement that he doesn't read the books he reviews makes one wonder how he expects to be taken seriously as a reviewer. That he realizes that Love & Napalm is totally opaque to all but a select few is also rather illuminating. Why, if he had anything to say in the "condensed novels", didn't he write then to reach his audience?

Actually, I get the impression from the interview that Ballard greatly underestimates the demand for his work in this country. I think there has always been a demand for his coherent short fiction. Vermillion Sands is even much sought-after, a bit of a collector's item. And I am beginning to hear good things about The Unlabeled Dream Company. I suspect that he could sell his short fiction to American SF magazines, if he cared to.

Certainly sf's readership is no longer predominately adolescent, but I think the magazine surveys and bookstore surveys may be underestimating the number. As an adolescent sf reader, I read mostly from local libraries. The average Locus reader now spends more than \$500 per year on sf—the average adolescent can not match that kind of output on a per capita basis. Also, adolescents would be much less likely to answer a survey. —DE

THERE! IN ONE SENTENCE

I HAVE INSULTED ASIMOV, STURGEON,
ELLISON, AND JOHN W. CAMPBELL JR!
I WONDER IF DOUG FRATZ
MINDS SEMI-COLON SPLICES?



Michael G. Franklin
The Science Fiction Shop
56 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10014

We have just read your review of our book, The Reader's Guide to Science Fiction. I just wanted to write and thank you for

all of us for the kind words and the sensible objection. I underline sensible because you are the first genre reviewer so far who has bothered to think about why the book was written and to critique it on those grounds. Congratulations.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Steve Davidson, Lee Smith, Tom Stalcar, Pat Cadigan, Ken Keller, Carl Glover, Gerald D. Etkind, Ulf Bennter, Dan Morrison, Wayne Hooks, David L. Travis, Allen Varney, Melissa Mia Hall, Douglas Barbour, Robert Block, Avedon Carroll, and others—if only there were more room!

DOZOIS cont. from pg.13

Best Fan Artist — Bill Rotsler; Best Fan Writer — Bob Shaw; Best Fanzine — Science Fiction Review; plus the Gandalf Award for Best Fantasy Novel to The White Dragon, by Anne McCaffrey; and the Grandmaster of Fantasy Award to Ursula K. Le Guin.

The 1978 Nebula Awards were: Best Novel — Dreamsnake, by Vonda N. McIntyre; Best Novella — "The Persistence of Vision," by John Varley; Best Novelette — "A Glow of Candles, a Unicorn's Eye," by Charles L. Grant; Best Short Story — "Stone," by Edward Bryant; plus a Grandmaster Award to L. Sprague De Camp.

The Fifth Annual World Fantasy Awards were: Best Novel — Gloriana, by Michael Moorcock; Best Collection — Shadows, edited by Charles L. Grant; Best Short Fiction — "Naples," by Avram Davidson; Best Artist — Alicia Austin and Dale Enzenbacher (tie); Special Award (professional) — Edward L. Ferman; Special Award (nonprofessional) — Donald H. Tuck; plus a Life Achievement Award to Jorge Luis Borges.

The John W. Campbell Memorial Award was won by Gloriana, by Michael Moorcock.

Dead in 1979 were: Robert Bruce Montgomery, who as "Edmund Crispin" was one of the best known British SF critics and anthologists; Ed Earl Repp, one of the early SF writers who worked for Gernsback's Amazing Science Wonder Stories, and other pulp magazines; Richard C. Meredith, author of We All Died At Breakaway Station and six other novels; John Barry, British film designer for such SF movies as Star Wars and Superman; Wilbur Scott Peacock, former editor of Planet Stories; Dr. Christopher Evans, computer scientist and one-time Science Editor for New Worlds; Walter H. Gillings, former editor of the British Tales of Wonder; Theodora Kroeber-Quinn, author of the classic anthropological study Ishi in Two Worlds and mother of SF writer Ursula K. Le Guin; and Immanuel Velikovsky, whose book Worlds in Collision outraged an entire generation of scientists.

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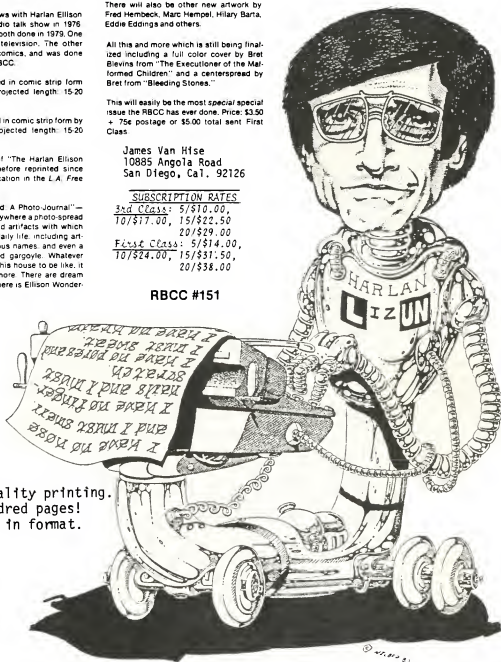
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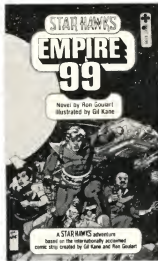


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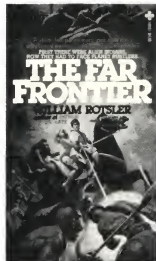


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